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ABSTRACT

Articles in this journal issue explore the relationship between the reader and the literature text, and discuss ways that instruction can enhance reader response to that literature. Following an introduction summarizing the nine articles, the titles and their authors are as follows: (1) "It Is the Poem That I Remake: Using Kenneth Burke's Pentad to Help Students Writing about Robert Frost's 'Mending Wall'" (Joseph Comprone); (2) "How Did You Like It? The Question of Student Response and Literature" (Charles R. Duke); (3) "Eliciting Response to Literature" (Joan W. Graham and Robert E. Probst); (4) "A Reader-Response Approach to the Teaching of Literature" (Sandra Harris); (5) "Enhancing Response to Literature: An Inservice Approach" (Susan S. Kissel and Peter M. Schiff); (6) "From Response to Analysis: Strategies for Involving Students in Thinking about Literature" (Kathleen W. Lampert); (7) "Responding to Literature from Within: The Untold Story Game" (Gary M. Salvner); (8) "Clustering for Reader Response to Creative Writing" (Patricia Schatteman); and (9) "The Writer, the Reader, the Poem: An Inquiry Approach to Poetry" (Denny T. Wolfe, Jr.). (HTH)

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Special Issue

THE RESPONDING READER
Nine New Approaches to Teaching Literature

Volume 32 Fall 1982 Number 1

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INTRODUCTION: THE RESPONDING READER

In his article for this issue, Gary Salvner writes, "The oldest new word in literature pedagogy is 'response.'" It's true. Concern for the student's own response to literature is an old theme, but one on which English teachers at all levels are working new and exciting variations. As evidence, I submit this issue of the Kentucky English Bulletin on "The Responding Reader."

The eleven authors of these nine articles make up a fair cross-section of our profession. The six Kentuckians are joined by five out-of-staters, and the seven university faculty share these pages with four high-school teachers, members of a group too little heard from in professional publications. Welcome to all.

I've struggled with ways of grouping these articles, but my efforts have been confounded by the mix, in almost every article, of theory, pedagogy, and applications to specific works. So the alphabet will have to do.

Joe Comprone, therefore, leads off by providing a useful and generalizable map for guiding students through a Frost poem; Joe's notes alone are worth the price of this issue, constituting an almost definitive bibliography on reader-response criticism. Charlie Duke surveys the field from his own humane perspective and opens fresh, surprising windows into the minds of student readers.

Georgians Joan Graham and Bob Probst offer valuable historical perspective, then provide detailed, specific teaching techniques; I plan to try some of them right away. Sandra

Harris gives a concise introduction to reader-response methods, then illustrates with her own materials for teaching of Of Mice and Men; if you want to know what the reader-response approach is all about, this may be the article to start with.

Susan Kissel and Peter Schiff generously summarize their NEH workshop for those of us not lucky enough to attend, and Massachusetts high-school teacher Kathleen Lampert takes us through a wonderful, workable unit on narrative fiction. Gary Salyner next shares his "Untold Story Game," a ready-to-copy and ready-to-use classroom simulation; I know Gary will appreciate receiving copies of the "front pages" that result from this activity.

Patricia Schatteman describes her use of the invention technique called "clustering" as a tool for focusing her students' response to literature; I'm confident that you'll find immediate use for it. Finally, Denny Wolfe turns responding readers into responding writers in an exciting unit in which students both write and read poems.

Again, thanks to the authors whose work appears herein; they could have published it anywhere, so I'm grateful that they chose the Kentucky English Bulletin.

Articles are still sought, on any aspect of the teaching of English, for the Winter 1982 issue; deadline is November 1. As always, the Spring 1983 issue will feature the winners of the KCTE Student Writing Contest. The Fall 1983 issue will be on "The Computerized English Class"; submissions will be welcome until August 1, 1983.

Ken Davis

IT IS THE POEM THAT I REMAKE: USING KENNETH BURKE'S PENTAD TO HELP STUDENTS WRITE ABOUT ROBERT FROST'S "MENDING WALL"

Joseph Comprone, University of Louisville

I
Background Theory

Recent literary theory has begun to re-focus our attention as teachers. Structuralists and reader-response critics encourage teachers to make the "act" of reading the central concern in our teaching, just as many educational theorists in the 20th century have encouraged teachers to move from a focus on subject to a focus on students as they learn.[1] What types of questions might teachers who wish to attend to the actual reading process rather than to the end result--the message or final meaning--ask themselves as they prepare to teach a modern poem, in this case, Robert Frost's "Mending Wall"? Can these questions be used to develop a methodology that might be transferred from one piece of literature to another, from one course to another, from one group of students to another--without sacrificing the teaching of critical reading skills? This essay will develop a strategy, based on reader-response criticism and Kenneth Burke's pentad, that teachers can apply to any literary work. The strategy will help students participate in a work's dramatic context, will help them discover meaning as they read, and will assure that their critical essays are based on an appreciation of the internal structures of a literary work.

II
Burke's Pentad

Kenneth Burke, in several seminal works, has developed a critical strategy that might well become a literature teacher's

most effective means of analyzing a complex literary work before using it to teach students how to read a literary work.[2] In outline, Burke's pentad is a simple concept. It suggests that every communication process is dramatic, that in every act of communication there is an agent who acts through language, there is an agency which enables the agent to act, there is a scene or background against which the verbal action is taken, there is an action that can be abstracted from the overall situation and represented as an event, and there is a purpose which guides the developing verbal action from beginning to end. Often these five elements, universal to every verbal situation, have been reduced to the more familiar journalistic questions--who, what, when, where, and why.[3] Such reductions, however, are not capable of helping teachers introduce students to the complex process of responding to literature simply because they fail to account for the more complex rhetorical contexts that are found in a literary work.

Literature, as James Moffett has argued in Teaching the Universe of Discourse, is the most symbolic and abstract form of discourse that any culture can produce.[4] When we read literature we are interpreting concrete, dramatic experience in abstract, symbolic terms. Denmark becomes a highly abstracted symbol of corruption in Hamlet; Hartford, Connecticut becomes a highly abstracted symbol of American materialism in Connecticut Yankee; Ahab's quest for the whale becomes a highly abstracted, almost emblematic symbol of human ambition and pride in a neutral or malevolent universe in Moby Dick. This move from concrete referent to abstract, dramatic interpretive context seems natural enough to most experienced readers of literature, English teachers included. But it is most certainly a learned skill, something that beginners must be taught, if we wish, as teachers, to expand our students' experiential and conceptual backgrounds as they read.

Rhetorical criticism would explain literature's deceptively abstract nature from a different perspective than Moffett's. Any work of literature has, in essence, two rhetorical triads within its context: the first constructed from the speaker, subject, audience context in the work itself; the second constructed from the interaction of implied author, implied reader, and implied or "real" subject. On the first level, for example, "Mending Wall" is a poem told by a New England farmer, addressed by implication to a reader who assumes interest in the life represented in the poem (the rituals and functions of farming in New England), and concerning the particular activity of wall-mending. The interaction of dramatic components of speaker, subject, and audience are indeed complex

on this level, but the reader of the poem can at least focus directly on dialogue, image, and action without worrying about ambiguities and ironies that evolve when focus is switched to the implied author's intention.

The second level of rhetorical interpretation is brought in once we consider what Robert Frost--pastoral and regional poet, master of dramatic irony--means to tell us through his rendering of the drama in this poem. Do we suppose an author who aligns himself with narrator, an enlightened spokesperson for progressive sharing of private property? Or do we search out a covert respect for the old stone savage, armed with fences against the "advances," the more communal thinking of the narrator? Does the assumed author find nature benign, neutral, or malevolent? Questions such as these could be asked of implied subject and readers as well. When readers ask these types of questions they are superimposing the more complex, implied rhetorical context of author, reader, and subject upon the simpler narrative-dramatic context within the poem itself.

III
Application of the Pentad to "Mending Wall"

How, then, can the pentad be applied to literary works by teachers who wish to introduce students to the complex interaction between the surface and implied contexts of a literary work? The answer is simple enough, in theory. Teachers, must, first, analyze the work in order to find which of the five elements are most important and to pinpoint where each dominates the act of reading the poem. The following is the result of my application of the pentad to Robert Frost's "Mending Wall." Particularly in a complex work, keep in mind that two or more elements of the pentad may well operate at simultaneous textual moments. Also, it is important to remember that a reader arrives at a fuller understanding of dramatic context by considering the relationships (Burke calls them "ratios") among the elements of the pentad.

The first twenty-seven lines of the poem serve two dramatic functions: they establish the scene for the symbolic action that will follow--wall-mending; they define the agents--the actors--who will act in the rest of the poem. To understand the intricacies of symbolic action in this poem, however, we must examine these two elements--scene and agent--in more detail. Frost, in all his work, posits a rugged natural world, often bereft of human inhabitants, certainly incapable of pathetic fallacy, and representing isolated, lonely human beings.[5] Human action, in Frost, is usually seen against the

backdrop of nature's rugged insensitivity. A close look at lines 1-27, with this broader understanding in mind, reveals a complication in the process of defining central agents for the poem. The poem's narrator is, at first, apparently sole agent: he tells us about the wall; he tells us about what happens to the wall; he and his neighbors have found the "gaps" in the wall; he notifies his neighbor and instigates the wall-mending; he describes how he and his neighbor mend the wall; indeed, he is also the one who reduces this work to game and play by antagonizing his neighbor and by reminding him of the uselessness of wall-mending. But a subterranean agent also acts through these twenty-seven lines--the "something" that destroys the wall, the human artifact ritualistically reconstructed every spring. It sometimes takes the form of "frozen-ground-swells," sometimes the form of hunters, sometimes the form of magic as it causes the stones to fall even as the neighbors mend. This opposition of human and natural agents creates a playful, agonistic context for the entire poem. We are watching a primal human game in which men work together to impose order on a potentially chaotic world. In fact, the culminating line of this first section explicitly labels wall-building "another kind of outdoor game."[6]

Scene also operates in two ways in these first twenty-seven lines. Lines 1-11 establish background for the action of wall-mending that will take place more specifically later in the poem: we see the New England terrain symbolized in "frozen-ground-swells" and "boulders in the sun"; we know the background of ritualized, seasonal behavior--the hunters, the "yelping dogs," the yearly evolution of "spring mending-time"--that will serve as context for the wall-mending that takes place later. In lines 12-27, we are given the scenic foreground for the game: the narrator's ritual of notifying his neighbor; their ritual of line-walking; their "spelling" of the loaf-stones that fall from assigned places. These later come to function as the game's rules.

Lines 1-27 of the poem, then, create a complex interrelationship of scene and agent. Experienced readers pick up all or at least some of this subconsciously. They, in a sense, <u>feel</u> the context that must be understood if the rest of the poem is to mean in a significant way. As teachers, then, it becomes our job to help students build this context, excuse the pun, from the "ground-swell" up. It is exactly at this point that I can clarify how Burke's pentad can help beginning readers. The elements of agent and scene become, with a first reading of lines 1-27 behind us, a means of shaping discussion and writing questions that will bring the subconscious bulk of the iceberg of literary context to the tip or surface of the beginning reader's attention.

IV

A Burkean Heuristic for Discovering the Dramatic Context of "Mending Wall"

Secondary and college readers would certainly be able to follow the surface language and narrative action of "Mending Wall." The diction and syntax are common enough, and the imagery is familiar or, at least, easily compared with the student's experiences with rural life. Students would, however, need the teacher's help in coming to understand how the poem's language and structure take action against the reader, how these elements lead the reader toward and away from different perspectives on the poem's meaning.[7] Here is a set of directions, response-questions, and writing exercises that will help teachers bring students to an understanding of reading as an active process in which meaning evolves from give and take among perspectives.

1. Background: The teacher should pose questions about the title. Students might be asked to write a paragraph explaining what they think the poem will be about after reading only the title and discussing its implications. Does this sound like a poem about work? What are a reader's expectations when that question is answered affirmatively?

2. Before students read lines 1-12 of the poem they should be asked to look for two agents in competition with one another. The agents do not have to be human. After the twelve lines have been read, students should write two paragraphs describing the agents in the poem. Students should go back and gather evidence from the text to help make their definitions of agents clearer.

3. Students should read lines 12-27 with the idea of looking for a definition of setting or scene in the poem. After completing this reading, they should write a paragraph in which they generalize a definition of the scene in the poem, followed by a specific list of sensory elements, taken from the poem, that support the generalization. This is probably the time for a brief discussion of denotation and connotation, abstract and concrete, image and symbol, also drawing from words and images in the poem.

4. At this point, teachers should use terministic screens and perspectives by incongruity, two Burkean concepts, to shape a writing exercise that will ask students to look back, using their remarks on scene and agent, and forward

(a "perspective by incongruity") to the rest of the poem.[8] When they play this janus-headed critical role, looking backward and forward in the poem almost simultaneously, students will begin to develop a sense of what Burke means by "terministic screens," the process by which a fluent reader first adopts the writer's terminology. This adopted terminology then is contrasted with, as reading progresses, the reader's ways of putting similar experiences and the poem's experience into words. Gradually, the writer's and the reader's terminologies come together to form a terminological screen through which the writer and reader come to view what were different experiences as one. These abstract terms, however, need not be taught to students; they are theories that are helpful in devising teaching strategies, such as the following:

> Describe in an introductory paragraph the "outdoor game" played by the narrator, the "old stone savage," and nature in lines 28–45. Then, look back over your previous writings in response to sections one and two of the poem and explain the parts played by the scene (natural world) and the three agents (the narrator, the stone savage, and the undefined "magic" in nature) in the drama of the "outdoor game."[9]

This exercise ought to help students to objectify the dramatic action, to accomplish what E. D. Hirsch, Jr. would call the understanding of the inferred or "probable meaning" of the poem.[10] In this case, meaning is not simply paraphased; it is rendered in terms of the poem's dramatic action—a perspective that will help beginning readers of literature develop what Louise Rosenblatt class an "aesthetic stance" as they read.[11] They will, in other words, participate in the action represented in the poem before they begin to make critical statements. Putting participation before criticism ought to help teachers avoid plot summaries and oversimplified, didactic statements of meaning.

The last section of the poem (lines 28–45) refocuses the reader's attention on different elements of the pentad. Whereas lines 1–27 place emphasis on agents operating in a particular scenic context, the last section of the poem puts emphasis on agency (how the action is carried out) and action (what actual event takes place). The game becomes the poet's means of making a statement; the act of wall-building becomes the poet's key symbol, his way of representing indirectly an expository statement on the human condition in a world not governed by any formative purpose—or, at least, not one discoverable by man. The reader, to understand and appreciate

the poem, must construct a new level of meaning as he or she responds to the "out door game," the narrator's question, and the old-stone savage's ritual answer.

This new level of meaning, if reader-response criticism is at all correct in its analyses of the literary reading process, must be constructed from the results of readings of earlier parts of the text. The fifth and last exercise in our sequence of reading activities should, in consequence, lead the students back to their earlier oral and written responses to lines 1-27 of the poem.

> 5. Read and discuss in workshop groups the last section of the poem (lines 28-45). Focus on the interaction between the narrator and the old stone savage. Why does the narrator ask his baiting questions? What type of expression, what gestures--if any--does the old-stone savage portray as he answers? What tones of voice do both speakers use? What do you think the narrator is driving at? What does he wish to accomplish? Does he accomplish it? Who really has the last word? Once these questions have been discussed, students should take on the role of either the narrator or the old stone savage and answer these questions: As narrator, why do you feel that the maxim "good fences make good neighbors" should be questioned? What is the reasoning behind your questioning? As the old-stone savage, explain the truth of "good fences make good neighbors." Use as much of the poem as you can to develop your answers.

This writing exercise should help students use the dramatic interaction of outdoor game (agency) and wall-mending (action) to re-experience the previously established tension among agents in the poem. It should enable them to see beyond the surface images of the poem to a deeper irony in which neither the views of the narrator or the old-stone savage are dominant.

In most secondary and beginning college classrooms this sequence of activities would, I believe, be sufficient. It would teach the students to enter the dramatic context of a literary work as participants; at the same time, it would help them develop distance and objectivity, or what Kenneth Burke calls "identification." Identification is a key concept throughout Burke's rhetoric; it represents the reader's partial sharing in and difference from the experience of the writer.[12] "Mending Wall" demands dramatic participation and a degree of critical-rational distance from its readers. Fluent readers speculate and participate simultaneously, using literary conventions and linguistic cues to direct their reaction to the

context of the poem itself, using—in turn—dramatic participation to keep their more abstract critical speculations under control. The assignment sequence described above uses the act of writing to help students to participate and speculate, taking on increasingly more critical and abstract roles as they read.

V

Subjective and Objective Responses to "Mending Wall"

There are two alternatives available to teachers who would wish to take the response heuristic I have outlined here further up the ladder of abstraction. In college classes, both should be pursued, one after the other. In a secondary class, either one or the other could be managed with a relatively brief extension in time.

One alternative is subjective in nature. I do not agree with David Bleich when he argues that, because all knowledge of literature has its roots in felt response, that, in turn, all literature pedagogy should begin with subjective responses.[13] Without doubt, subjective response must be incorporated in the reading process, but I believe it should be brought in after the students have been helped by teachers to participate in the dramatic action of the poem itself—not as formal critics but as participants in the literary "event." Moving in this direction from the activities I have already outlined would entail three general possibilities:

1. having students recall, list, and connect with the poem past events that seem related to their reading of "Mending Wall";

2. having students record notes on feelings they had while first reading the poem—first, in shorthand while reading the poem, then in fuller form after having participated in the heuristics described above;

3. having students go back over these two types of responses and compose an account of how their subjective reactions compared with their more objective first reactions to the dramatic context of the poem.

College teachers who might wish to build upon these earlier dramatic and subjective responses would bring the students to interpretations of authorial intention in the poem.[14] Many contemporary interpretations of this poem find irony in it, an irony in which the implied author is assumed to dismiss both the narrator's and the old-stone savage's

points of view. In this type of reading, the ambiguity and tension inherent in the final lines of the poem between the narrator's and savage's ways of seeing fences in reconciled into the implied author's firm belief in the powers of ambiguity. Men must work together or they work apart, as Frost often suggested; the wisdom of "Mending Wall," this final reading suggests, evolves from an author who dramatically juxtaposes two divergent views of walls to construct a third view, a synthesis of the others. Men need walls--and things like them--to keep themselves together, to keep the spirit of community intact, even when "He is all pine and I am apple orchard." Without this sense of community, nature succeeds in forcing men apart. What seems to keep men apart--walls, fences, work of all kinds--actually keeps them together.

Bringing students to this more objective level of interpretation would demand a reconstruction of the writings produced in response to particular dramatic sequences as they were defined in the first-stage dramatic activities, and it would depend on incorporation of subjective reactions as they were composed in the second-stage activities. Reconstructions of this sort would also demand more outside information--on Frost's work in general, on his biography, on general literary techniques such as irony and point of view and their function in literature in general.[15]

VI
What The Students Have Learned

Learning sequences such as those described above accomplish two general aims: they enable teachers to intervene in the reading process in ways that will assure that students "read" literature on an active, dramatic level before they engage in more abstract interpretation; they also assure that students develop habits of selection and prediction that are consistent with the current psycholinguistic model of reading when they read.[16]

Students will also have made specific gains in understanding "Mending Wall." First, they will have moved from what might have been a simple acceptance of the narrator's scepticism about walls in general to a more complex understanding of the tension between the narrator's and the old-stone savage's views in the poem. Second, from a simple acceptance of a didactic moral concerning "good fences make good neighbors" the students will have moved to a more complex realization of the place of ambiguity in developing a set of

moral beliefs—out of the tension between the narrator's and the old-stone savage's views comes a more complex synthesis of respect for and scepticism about the function of walls in human society. Third, students come to appreciate the complex relationship between the triad in the work and the triad of assumed author, reader, and subject that is implicit in all serious literature. They come to realize Frost's intentions, his use of a dramatically-realized game to render meaning symbolically. In the process, students involve themselves in a learning experience marked by what John Dewey described as "a sense of sharing in the consequences of what goes on" and, as a result, become more committed to learning as discovery than when they must simply reproduce information.[17]

Notes

[1]Reader-response criticism and the learn-by-doing educational theory of cognitive psychologists who work from a post-Dewey model strive for similar goals. Both work within a broader context within which learning to read becomes part of the larger circle of learning in general. Both approaches put major emphasis on the active participation of the reader-learner within the process of reading and learning. Frank Smith brings reading and general learning theory explicitly together in Understanding Reading, 2nd. ed. (New York: Holt, 1978). Wolfgang Iser succinctly summarizes the active participation of the reader in the making of literary meaning in his chapter on "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," The Implied Reader (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1974), pp. 274-294. James Moffett, in Teaching the Universe of Discourse, develops a learn-by-doing writing curriculum that progresses from concrete to abstract reading and writing, sequenced along a continuum that moves from personal narrative to public discourse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968). He applies Dewey's functional learning theory directly to reading and writing in the schools. See "John Dewey, "Experience in Thinking," Democracy and Education (New York: Free Press, MacMillan, 1966), pp. 139-151.

[2]For general discussion of the pentad see Language as Symbolic Action, Pt. I, pp. 1-97 and Chapter Seven, "A Dramatistic View of the Origins of Language and Postscripts on the Negative," pp. 419-479. The most thorough treatment of the pentad and the ratios among its components is presented in A Grammar of Motives (New York: Prentice Hall, 1945).

[3]An exception is William Irmscher's The Holt Guide to English, 2nd. ed. (New York: Holt, 1976), pp. 30-48. Irmscher provides sequences of complex questions on each element in the pentad; he suggests ways in which students might write "scenarios" that would use the pentad to dramatize particular writing topics; he suggests ways of exploring the negative aspects of each element; and he closes by relating the pentad to generating ideas for different types of discourse.

[4]Teaching the University of Discourse, pp. 50-53.

[5]John Lynen, in "Frost as Modern Poet," argues that Frost's pastoral-rural imagery and language become his means of

imposing order on the modern, urban, and morally chaotic world (in Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by James M. Cox, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962, p. 186). This order, rather than an essential component in nature, is actually entirely linguistic; it is imposed by Frost's narrators on situations that are in themselves often terrifyingly disordered, at least to human perception. Yvor Winters recognizes this fact in "Robert Frost: or the Spiritual Drifter as Poet," Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 63. Winters, however, does not take Frost's representation of an amoral or even malevolent natural world as an ontological assertion; he sees it, in contrast, as an essential lack of courage, the poet's inability to make definite moral choices.

[6]This and subsequent references to "Mending Wall" are taken from X. J. Kennedy's reprinting of the poem in Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama, 2nd. ed. (Boston: Little-Brown, 1979), p. 750.

[7]Wolfgang Iser discusses the problem of multiple and shifting perspectives in the act of reading literature in The Act of Reading (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978). See particularly his discussion of "theme and horizon" (p. 96 ff.), where he argues that previously read events become the background or "horizon" to the reader's focus on theme at any given moment in the reading process.

[8]The premises behind the terministic-screen concept are scattered throughout Burke's work. In Attitudes Toward History (Los Altos, California: Hermes Publications, 1959), p. 260 ff, Burke takes the "heads I win, tails you lose" mode of dichtomous thought then prevalent in the behavioral and positivistic sciences and uses it as the basis for a dialectic that transcends dichotomous thinking through the opposition and ultimate synthesis of the writer's and reader's terministic screens. In "Our Attempt to Avoid Mere Relativism," Language As Symbolic Action, pp. 52-62, Burke defines terministic screens as chunks of language that direct the reader's attention to a pattern of symbols or terms within the larger field of discourse that is represented by the whole text. The writer's particular structuring of terms becomes the reader's new perspective on a field of experience. Perspectives that are drawn from the writer's terminology are then placed beside the reader's previously composed terms for the experience. The result is a more complex and synthesized "perspective by incongruity."

[9]In a recent College Composition and Communication article, "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing," Linda Flower and John R. Hayes point out in detail how successful writers use successively written notes and drafts as means of discovering and reshaping what their primary goals are as they write (XXXII, Dec. 1981, 365-387). This idea of using writing to revise and reshape what is being written is the same type of thing I am asking for as students respond to a literary work. In responding to literature, however, the student must shape overall goals that outline different types of response and participation within the work as it unfolds its meaning at various levels.

[10]This is a paraphrase, not a direct quotation. Meaning, Hirsch argues, derives from the reader's understanding of the implied or "intrinsic genre" of a work, which is created by the author's careful placement of literary cues, conventions, and techniques within a specific dramatic context. See, especially, Validity in Interpretation, Chapter Three, "The Concept of Genres" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 68-126.

[11]The Reader, The Text, and the Poem (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), pp. 27.

[12]The most condensed discussion of rhetorical "identification" appears on pp. 19-37 of Burke's A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

[13]"...we are...reminded that the essence of a symbolic work is not in its visible sensory structure or in its manifest semantic load but in its subjective re-creation by a reader...." Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1975), p. 21.

[14]Frost, in his playfully enigmatic way, consistently denied the literary or political intentions that were often attributed to this poem by general readers and critics. The best known of these denials came about when Frost visited Moscow in August, 1962, as reported in Lawrance Thompson and R. H. Winnick's Robert Frost: The Later Years, 1938-1963 (New York: Holt, 1976), p. 316. In the midst of a series of readings to small private audiences Frost read "Mending Wall" to a group in Moscow. As Thompson and Winnick put it, "with the issue of Berlin still far from resolved, and with the wall the East Germans had erected in 1961 still drawing widespread criticism in the west, Frost's choice of this particular poem

seemed inescapably political to many ...." But Frost persistently denied any political intent, and went on to add that he had had "lots of adventures with that poem .... People are frequently misunderstanding it or misinterpreting it. The secret of what it means I keep." In a letter to Leonidas W. Payne, Jr., Frost responded to a query on the meaning of "Mending Wall" with the remark that "I should be sorry if a single one of my poems stopped with either of those things [atmosphere and character]--stopped anywhere in fact. My poems--I should suppose everybody's poems--are all set to trip the reader head foremost into the boundless." Selected Letters of Robert Frost, ed. by Lawrance Thompson (New York: Holt, 1964), p. 344. In both contexts, Frost seems to align himself with Iser's contention that the meaning of a poem is potentially infinite, never fully exhausted, and that to stop at any particular level is to impoverish the concept of "literary meaning" in its own right. Frank Lentricchia, of all the critics of "Mending Wall," best describes Frost's emphasis on shared process rather than didactic meaning when he argues that "It is a poem that celebrates a process, not the thing itself.... The narrator ... is not committed to ends, but to the process itself which he sees as having nonutilatarian value." The reader, Lentricchia suggests, must also share in the narrator's savoring of the experience itself, its playful delight by taking on and trying out different perspectives on the drama, always balancing perspectives until a third perspective is synthesized from them. Robert Frost: Modern Poetics and the Landscape of Self (Durham: Duke University Press, 1975), p. 106.

[15]Readers, in other words, would have to possess various levels and kinds of information drawn from outside the poem's text itself in order to progress from their dramatic participation in the poem's meaning to what E. D. Hirsch, Jr. would call the "significance" of the experienced meaning. See Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 63.

[16]This model is succinctly summarized in Charles R. Cooper and Anthony R. Petrosky, "A Psycholinguistic View of the Fluent Reading Process," Journal of Reading (December 1976), 184-207.

[17]Democracy and Education, p. 147.

HOW DID YOU LIKE IT? THE QUESTION OF STUDENT RESPONSE AND LITERATURE

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How many times have we walked into our classrooms and said to students, "Well, how did you like the story you read for today?" And what has happened. Did students answer quickly and eagerly or did they just sit there—waiting. Most of us probably do not expect a response, but we keep tossing out the question from force of habit and a forlorn hope that some one, some time, somewhere, will respond.

As English teachers we have been trained, even possibly overtrained, to think of reading as an analytical act, one which calls for delving into the various aspects of a work (the period in which it was written, the life of the author, the style of the writing) to determine the work's meaning. Then, perhaps, we transfer our discoveries into the form of a critical essay. Although there is nothing fundamentally wrong with such activity—after all, it brought those of us who are voracious readers of literature to this point in our careers—it may not be the most appropriate route for many of the students with whom we meet daily.

For most of our students, reading is not a major concern in their world. If reading is important, it's for determining what movie is playing, how the local or national sports teams are doing, or perhaps what important people, especially in the entertainment field, are doing. There may exist a thirst for basic information related to cars, fashions, stereo equipment, computers or other hobbies or interests. But the key to whatever reading is done on a voluntary basis by students is that it provides them with information for aspects of their lives which they believe to be important. To many students, their personal lives seem quite unrelated to the majority of

selections that appear in the classroom literature anthology, even though we may have made attempts to select pieces we believe should come close to matching their needs and interests.

One of the basic tenets about reading, which has become obscured, however, is that all readers, no matter how sophisticated, begin their response to what they read on the basis of a subjective reaction to the experience of the text. Louise Rosenblatt in The Reader, The Text, and The Poem (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978) suggests that there are two types of reading response, the efferent, or non-literary reading, and the aesthetic, or literary reading.

> In nonaesthetic reading, the reader's attention is focused primarily on what will remain as residue after the reading--the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out.... In aesthetic (literary) reading, in contrast, the reader's primary concern is what happens during the actual reading event.... 'In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text. (pp. 23 and 24-25)

We tend to emphasize the nonaesthetic reading in our classrooms by giving students the impression that instant recall is most important; therefore, discussion of a reading assignment becomes more like an inquisition with the prosecutor--the teacher--firing questions at the defendants--the students--who, in turn, afraid they will incriminate themselves, refuse to answer. The sad part about this distortion of the response to reading is that both students and adults know that what happens most frequently in the classroom is not what happens outside. Given the ability to read--and most of us have that without question--we have learned unconsciously to read aesthetically. Whether we learned this from watching television, going to movies, listening to people tell stories or from being read to, we have acquired the ability to enter a piece of literature as an experience in its own right. If we doubt this, we should check in the backpockets of adolescents or in their pocketbooks; far more often than we might expect, there will be a paperback there. Even students who have difficulty reading school texts for information can read fiction; it may not be Hawthorne or Melville--more likely it will be gothic fiction for the girls and science fiction for

the boys--but, ironically, the selections were made on their potential more for the aesthetic experience than for the efferent one.[1]

Because this dichotomy exists, we need to become more aware of how to put students back in touch with the aesthetic role of reading done for the classroom. We do not need to drop entirely the nonliterary aspects of classroom talk and response, but since our response as readers is essentially aesthetic in the first reading, that is where we should concentrate our efforts for bringing the two types of response into sharper focus.

One of the exciting aspects of reading often overlooked by students, as well as many adults, is that once we complete the "reading" of a text, we are not necessarily finished with it, any more than we may be finished with an experience that occurs in our lives. Often we turn that experience around and around in our minds, seeking new angles on it, replaying certain parts to see how the roles might be changed. In other words, if something interests us or affects us in some way, we are quite free to reflect, reconstruct, and interpret, and in the process come to a better understanding of what might not have been as clear in the beginning. Therefore, reading should be first a conversation between text and reader in which the reader asks questions of his or her own design and seeks answers and makes comments.

How, then, do we go about developing student response to literature which stresses the reader's involvement with the text and the reactions to that involvement. David Bleich in Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism (Urbana: NCTE, 1975) suggests that we capitalize on "two basic components which contribute to any individual's emotional response to anything--affect and association."

Affect may be described as the "gut reaction" we experience when our raw emotions are touched: anger, jealousy, envy, contentment; it also tends to be what people mention when asked how they are feeling about something--"I cried during that movie" or "I really felt sad when the father went away." Teachers will quickly recognize this level of response in student comments such as "I hated this story" or "I liked the story okay I guess." Students making such responses usually do not follow with any specific explanation; in fact, conversations seem to terminate quickly after statements of affect have been made. But it is this first level of response that must be acknowledged, even encouraged, before we can move to the second, that of association. Student readers need to have the

opportunity to register their emotional reactions to reading. Implicit, then, in our question of "How did you like it" is an invitation to respond on the affective level. However, students have learned that if they do rise to that bait, frequently an inquisition follows in which the teacher tries to pinpoint the reaction, and almost always this search serves not as an exploration of the student's feelings or the sources of those feelings, but simply as a check of whether or not the student read the story.

Still, to actually understand affective responses, we need to have an understanding of what prompted them. A student who says, "That story made me feel good" or "I really understood how the character felt right then" provides only a hint. Beneath the surface response, memories and reflection lie which fed the response and those associations are what makes the reading an aesthetic experience. Most often these associations are in the form of "stories" or anecdotes, and it is these anecdotal associations, or "analogies" as Bleich calls them, which can form the basis for real understanding of students' response to various pieces of literature. Once again, however, these associations are not rendered willingly by most students because that calls for sharing a bit of themselves. Few of us are ready to volunteer explanations of our feelings when in a group of people who are, for the most part, strangers. Of course, we are not talking here about simply telling everything or anything--a condition which sometimes occurs in the early grades' sessions of show and tell. There's a discipline in subjective response that comes from trying to explain the association between text, reader and response clearly.

Because many students bring so much unnecessary literary baggage with them, trying to engage students directly in personal responses to literature tends not to work well. Instead, students need a variety of non-threatening opportunities to ease into this perspective. One possible approach may lie in what James Britton and others[2] have come to call the "expressive mode" of discourse--the kind of writing which comes directly from the writer's experience into words and which assumes a direct concern with the writer, rather than with some other purpose. The joining of reading and writing as a part of subjective response, therefore, seems quite logical. We must remember, though, that the forms and modes of expressive discourse are rooted, as the reader/writer's emotions are, in the response to an experience rather than in imitation or recreation of forms discovered by objective analysis.

All of us have been in the classroom long enough to realize that students will not perceive readily the connection between reading and writing nor will they necessarily respond

honestly at first when invited to do so. For this reason, they may need some prompts and ample opportunity to practice. Perhaps the easiest way to introduce students to this way of responding is through the keeping of a reading process journal. If entries in this journal are handled not as finished pieces of writing to be graded but merely as explorations and attempts to get closer to what happens during and after the reading, the entries will provide useful information about the progress students are making in dealing with their subjective responses to reading.

The following categories and questions suggest some of the possible prompts that might be used with students.[3]

Memory

When we finish reading a piece of literature, quite often we discover that particular thoughts flash through our minds, such as "I can't believe that old man reminded me so much of my grandfather." Explore such connections between the text and your memories--what are the similarities or differences? Can you focus, perhaps, on one incident or anecdote that seems to explain the connections?

Belief

Most of us have strong opinions or beliefs about the number of things in our lives. Perhaps it is hard to put those beliefs into words without their sounding a bit like slogans: prejudice destroys people, adults don't understand teenagers, etc. But if you found some of your beliefs surfacing as you read, talk about them--What prompted them to surface? Where did those beliefs originate? How did those beliefs affect your response to the story? To what extent do you find your own life reflecting those beliefs?

Feelings

Reading tends to be an emotional experience if we get involved with literature at all. Some pieces of literature, of course, engage us more deeply than others. A key statement, action, word, or idea can cause a strong emotion in us--a feeling of anger, sadness, or pleasure perhaps. What is it in this work which prompted strong emotion or even, possibly, a lack of feeling? Why does it affect you this way? Does such an emotional response surprise you or not?

Sharing

Suppose you read a piece of literature and there's no one around to share it with? How do you feel? If people were available, what would you want to say about the piece? What would be going on in your mind before you spoke about your reading? To what extent would past experience in talking about literature shape your oral response? What happens when you talk about your reading that affects your recall of the reading experience?

Meaning

To what extent do you discover meaning already in a piece of literature? To what extent do you think you place meaning in what you read? How would you describe this latter process if it occurs? Where does your "meaning" come from?

In practice, the journal entries take many directions, often blending emotion and analysis, a combination, of course, that we are pleased to see. For instance, in one class students were asked to read the "Introduction" to Studs Terkel's Working (New York: Random House, 1974) and then "free write" on the subject of work. During the next class they were asked to write their interpretation of the "Introduction" itself and then a third journal assignment asked them to compare the previous two entries. Here are one student's responses, including a fourth unassigned journal response.[4]

#1. Work! ....Why are we so geared to money in our society? Almost everyone works out of necessity and not many people like their jobs. I don't think Americans are so decadent, but it leaves me with the question that maybe there is an alternate method of happiness and survival...without so much emphasis put on work. Work has different meanings...A construction worker doesn't think of a bank teller as a working man or woman.

#2. The essay "Introduction" is probably a true feeling among workers in America today...but I was disturbed by the sense of pessimism.... Using a topic like "What's Wrong with America" and letting Mr. Terkel write it, you would think he studied under H. L. Mencken, of that I have no doubt. I wonder if Mr. Terkel would be as...explicit and adamant if he (did) some work on

what's good and right with America? Sardonic, acerbic words and writing usually tell us what we already know and will admit.... Too often the creators of these works never give us any solutions to the problems... I seem to have gotten off on a tangent I really didn't mean to...

#3. When completing the free-writing assignment last Friday about Work I felt, after reading the essay by Studs Terkel, that a lot of the people he wrote about felt like me. Necessity is the primary reason people work. Those who find fulfillment and satisfaction in their jobs are extremely fortunate as the majority of working people don't. I mentioned the emphasis put on work and a different view is held today. Monotony has always been a problem in the working sector and I was reminded of some of my jobs by the switchboard operator and the gas meter reader he used as illustrations. I firmly believe the people of this country would like to see an alternate or modified plan.

#4. I watched the television musical version of Studs Terkel's working people. Since I had read the Introduction to Working, I could understand the people.... When I first read it I formed the wrong opinion of Terkel and his purpose. I realize now he didn't intend to be vitriolic. I never should have compared him to H. L. Mencken.

After students have kept their journals for a time, they may be encouraged to review their entries and perhaps select one or several entries which they are willing to "flesh out" into fuller pieces of written discourse. Such pieces, called for once or twice during a term, could be treated as regular writing assignments and evaluated in much the same way as other finished papers. Students will vary greatly in what they choose to write about in these papers. Some students focus on one story and their reactions to it, refining their journal entries until a definite connection or focus emerges that, to them, reveals something important about their personal response as readers. Others will choose to select several entries on several works and attempt to show how their reading process seems to vary or remain the same from one piece of literature to another. Still others will become interested in tracing their emergence as readers who are willing to talk more directly and subjectively about their responses to reading.

In the embryo stages of journal writing, the teacher must be certain to respect the entries. Occasionally picking up the journals and responding only as another reader, not as a critic, helps. Such response lets students know that ultimately their reactions can be shared and that the audience for them will be thoughtful and non-evaluative. Many teachers find it helpful also to share entries from their own reading journals with students, letting them see the same process going on with the adult reader.

The journals can also serve as a catalyst for open dialogue in the classroom. Patience becomes a real virtue in attempting to help students become comfortable enough to carry on conversations in the classroom where everyone hears the personal reaction that previously might only have been expressed in a journal. As teachers, we like to believe that we have been encouraging personal response in class, but transcriptions of numerous classroom discussions about literature usually show that the "conversation" is actually a monologue, punctuated on occasion with Socratic dialogue. So, we have work to do here if personal response is going to be valued at all in the classroom as a valid part of the reading experience. One of the best ways to do this is to model conversations with students, beginning with some individuals who are comfortable talking in class. Directions for such open conversations are simple, and can be offered to students in the following form:

1. We're having a conversation, not a lecture; that means at least two people have to be involved. In the conversation, we're responding to each other's responses to the reading, not testing each other.

2. Anyone may refuse to answer a question if it seems too personal or if it seems unanswerable; we can do this by telling the questioner, "I'd rather not discuss that right now."

3. Anyone in the conversation may ask a question.

4. Anyone participating in the conversation may end it at any time.

Admittedly, such conversations take time and preparation on the part of both students and teachers. As strongly conditioned as they are to listen and not to respond, much less question, students will find the initial conversations difficult and awkward; teachers, too, will undergo some discomfort and a concern about how productive the first attempts are.

Journal responses can serve as starting points for the conversations. Discussing what happened in trial conversations will help—even listening to taped playbacks of dialogues—to determine the key elements for a good conversation. The following observations may prove useful in developing a model and may also provide guidelines for students who should, eventually, develop their own "conversations" with peers.[5]

A. Getting Started—the beginning of a conversation should be open-ended; for example, "What part of the story seems to stick in your mind?" or "If you were going to come back to this story in three or four weeks, what do you think you will remember about it?"

B. Focusing the Conversation—the talk focuses on what the readers have to say about themselves and their experience with the text now that they have had time to reflect. For instance, one speaker might comment on the number of household duties a character in the story seemed responsible for; the other speaker might respond; "You seem to feel the mother had a number of duties—how does that compare with the number of chores your mother had to do?"

C. Keeping the Conversation Going—if responses are fragmented or vague, simple restatement of the responses or a clarification requested from the text itself may be all that's necessary to develop the content of the talk; as responses become fuller and clearer, summaries of each other's responses will be helpful and requests for more detail, additional examples, and verification will become natural.

D. Disagreeing—no speaker should be hesitant about offering contrasting interpretations. Such interpretations, though, should be offered as personal response, not as final statements of fact. Differences can lead to interesting discussions if we remember to respect each other's personal response. Asking the other person to suggest areas of the text which prompted the contrasting interpretation will be helpful as will indicating what part of the response is purely personal and what parts are directly related to the text.

E. Ending the Conversations—as the discussion draws to a close each speaker should attempt to make some judgments about what was heard. These judgments can be reflected in attempts to summarize the other person's

views. All conversations should end with a sense that everyone was heard and everyone received response.

Organizing classroom study of literature to include personal response as the first step toward greater understanding and appreciation of literature and the role of reading in a person's life is not easy. But in many respects we as teachers share the same kind of problems that students do when they come to us. For example, Louise Rosenblatt, in the following passage, might just as well be describing teachers:

> Year after year as freshmen come into college, one finds that even the most verbally proficient of them, often those most intimately drawn to literature, have already acquired a hard veneer, a pseudo-professional approach. They are anxious to have the correct labels—the right period, the biographical background, the correct evaluation. They read literary histories and biographies, critical essays, and then, if they have the time, they read the works.[6]

Together, teachers and students need to remove the veneer that covers many of their classroom responses to literature and discover the real substance beneath, that of the centrality of the reader's personal response to the total experience of reading.

Notes

[1]See Charles R. Duke, "The Case of the Divorced Reader," English Journal (February 1977), pp. 33-36.

[2]See James Britton and others. The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18). London: Schools Council Publication, 1975.

[3]Adapted from Michael Piper and Joseph Comprone, "Literature and Composition," Kentucky English Bulletin (Fall 1981) and David Bleich, Readings and Feelings, An Introduction to Subjective Criticism (NCTE, 1975), pp. 101-105.

[4]Taken from unpublished student journal, at Paducah Community College, Paducah, Kentucky.

[5]Adapted from Agnes J. Webb, "Transactions with Literary Texts: Conversations in Classrooms," English Journal (March 1982), pp. 56-70; see also Robert E. Probst, "Response-Based Teaching of Literature," English Journal (November 1981), pp. 43-47.

[6]"Acid Test in Teaching Literature," English Journal (February 1956), p. 71.

ELICITING RESPONSE TO LITERATURE

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> The central justification for literature is that it is an open source for self-realization and fulfillment by the reader....
>
> Mario Valdes[1]

The Situation

Walking into a classroom to confront thirty blank faces, armed with a tattered copy of Adventures in Reading, loins girded with lists of behavioral objectives from the curriculum guide, comforted and inspired by memories of a favorite English professor, a teacher may be forgiven his or her fear and trembling. Self-realization and fulfillment may have lured him or her into literary studies in the first place, but the students don't seem eager for it, the objectives say nothing about it, and the textbook's selections may not seem so open a source as Valdes suggests.

In such circumstances, it isn't surprising that a teacher may fall back upon the security of the behavioral objectives. They are, after all, something to do—they make the long day seem somehow predictable, manageable. They offer activities, work, busyness. They will fill the hours.

Nor is it surprising if the teacher takes refuge in the order and logic of the text. It does proceed in an orderly fashion, moving, in the historically arranged courses of the upper grades, from Beowulf to Virginia Woolfe, from year to year, in a manner comprehensible to anyone who can count from 1 to 1990. In the lower grades, the text may find its organizing

principles in genre study, providing, again, a plan comprehensible to anyone who can tell the difference between big and little. The differences, after all, between short story and novel are so simple--one is longer than the other--that they can be taught effectively in a few minutes, or so complex and subtle that a student must write stories and novels to understand them.[2]

Still less is it surprising if the teacher falls back upon the approaches and techniques of a remembered professor, whose brilliant lectures, wealth of knowledge, depth of understanding, and--most of all--grandeur of stature before the class, awed students into submission and complacence. That professor, quite likely a New Critic of sorts, had standards and strategies.

Unfortunately, those behavioral objectives, concrete, specific, and measurable as they are, are also probably silly, meaningless, trivial, and usually unintelligible. They are the bits and pieces of intellectual activity, fragmented and disassembled, uninformed by any significant vision of the purposes and possibilities of literature study. Unfortunately, too, the organizational principles derived from genre study and from literary history aren't appropriate in the secondary schools. Few of those thirty faces will brighten at the prospects of comparing the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnets, of learning the characteristics of the modern short story, of tracing literary influences through the seventeenth century. Genre study and literary history are not among the natural interests of the typical adolescent. And most unfortunate of all, the New Critical professor, awesome as he or she may have been, exemplifies a vision of literature and pedagogy that is not well-received by many secondary school students. Scholes describes that professor's work:

> In the name of improved interpretation, reading was turned into a mystery and the literature classroom into a chapel where the priestly instructor... astounded the faithful with miracles of interpretation.[3]

Few faces are brightened these days by miracles of interpretation.

And even if they were, it wouldn't be appropriate for the secondary English classroom to devote itself to astounding the masses. It would be a far more significant accomplishment to teach students to profit from literature as Valdes suggests they might.

The Possibilities

Changes in critical perspective:

During the past several decades, New Critical theory has begun to lose its vitality, and it has been challenged by other conceptions of literature and the act of reading.[4] Louise Rosenblatt, David Bleich, Wolfgang Iser, and others have begun to develop elaborate and convincing philosophical justifications for an approach that has come to be known as reader-response criticism. Suzanne Howell, Charles Duke, and others concerned with the secondary schools have begun to experiment with the implications of their theories in the English class. Reader-response criticism, and thus much of response-based teaching of literature, is predicated upon the vision of literature and of reading expressed succinctly by Iser:

> A literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative.[5]

Thus reflective reading begins with the expression and discussion of initial reactions to the work. If the students' imaginations are to be engaged, if they are to work things out for themselves, to begin elsewhere is pointless. Their responses--emotional, intellectual, or visceral; primitive or sophisticated; perceptive or confused--are the substance upon which their imaginations can best work. To expect students, too early, to be interested in the author, the genre, the period, the body of critical commentary, is to distract them from the contact with the work that they might naturally achieve. Those interests--in the data about the literature--might arise later, in the course of discussion of the works, and if they do it is of course appropriate to pursue them, but they are unlikely to be the starting point for most students. Rather, the first question is "Does the boy get the girl or not?"

And the second, and more important question for the critic and teacher who conceive of the literary work as Iser suggests, is, "What do I make of this?" That is, what does the work say to me? How do I see it? Does it offer perceptions and insights that I find valuable? Such questions are more natural and interesting to students, perhaps because they focus so clearly upon them. They ask students to consider their visions and perceptions, to examine and clarify them, rather than simply to absorb the visions and perceptions of someone else. To begin here is *not* to invite the student to become

self-indulgent and lazy and anti-intellectual. Duckworth, who has studied the nature of learning, would argue that, on the contrary, such teaching is most likely to contribute to the student's cognitive growth:

> ...teachers can assist this growth primarily by accepting the child's perspective as the legitimate framework for generating ideas--allowing the child to work out her or his own questions and answers.[6]

Her statement is almost an echo of Iser's.

Implied patterns for the literature classroom:

The teacher of literature who agrees with Iser and Duckworth would not demand that the student's first responses be intellectual, reasoned statements, or even that they be fully articulated. Instead, he or she would welcome tentative, halting, probing comments, partially formulated statements about self or work, and encourage students to look upon such statements as the raw material from which clearer conceptions and judgments might be made. He or she might begin with the vaguest, most amorphous, non-directive question possible, something analagous to a shrug of the shoulders or a "Well, what do you make of this?" If students respond, if they have some perception or response to offer, then the class is under way. The ensuing discussion is a delicate process, requiring the teacher to react quickly, but it is not limited to meandering and lazy gropings after unfounded opinions. Rather, subsequent questions can explore the students' reactions, seeking out the differences and similarities among them, clarifying them, searching for their points of origin in the text and in the students' experiences. The pattern reflects Piaget's insistence that one goal of education must be to get "children to check their ideas and not to accept as valid the first thought that comes to mind."[7]

Such teaching clearly demands a comfortable classroom, with a reasonable level of trust. Neither teacher nor students should fear making mistakes or expressing ideas that they may later wish to retract. Everyone must be reasonably free from the damaging obsession for correctness with which many schools so carefully and methodically infect their victims. Students must, as Elkind puts it, be invited "to check their ideas without the onus of right and wrong, particularly when the alternative idea is presented tentatively,"[8] as, of course, it must be in the sort of probing, tentative discussion that is

intended to build upon and reshape first impressions and reactions.

The tone in the classroom must encourage cooperation if students are to feel comfortable offering their tentative and untried observations and responses. They must therefore be encouraged to respect and accept the contributions of others. At times those contributions may seem digressive and irrelevant. At times they will be conscious efforts to distract and confuse. But if the potential of the group is respected, ultimately, many of the students may come to recognize that they have much to learn from one another. Erikson points out that it is largely in the peer group that questions of importance to the adolescent are tackled, perhaps because part of the adolescent identity crisis is a struggle against adult direction and control. By establishing a forum for exchanging opinions, experiences, reactions, and judgments, response-based teaching provides an opportunity for students to deal with the significant events presented in the literature, which are, if the literature is well-selected, the significant events of human life, under the gentle guidance of someone presumable more experienced in both life and literature.

Basing literature instruction on the reader's responses is not intended to transform the classroom into an emotional, anti-intellectual experience, nor does it deny the validity of interest in literary history or biography, in close analytical reading, or in any of the other practiced approaches to literary studies. It does, however, reflect two assumptions possibly not shared by those who emphasize some of the other, perhaps more traditional approaches. The first of these is the belief that there is a natural human interest in understanding one's own responses to the world in general and to a literary work in particular. It is natural and human to want to comprehend oneself and one's friends, and one's world. The literary work may be one avenue to that understanding.

The second is the belief that meaning is made, not found, and that it is made by bringing prior experience, unique and individual as it may be, together with current experience, observing the meeting with the greatest intellectual rigor possible.

The Practice

Despite the increasing attention to response-based teaching in the journals, however, many teachers have been reluctant to experiment with it, perhaps because it seems to

offer a less concrete and manageable pedagogy than that of New Criticism or of the typical textbook and curriculum guide. To emphasize student response, unreliable and unpredictable as it might be, seems to invite chaos. These new or revived visions of literature do suggest, however, some workable strategies that have begun to prove themselves effective and enjoyable for secondary school students.

The brief written response:

Consider, for instance, strategies implicit in Iser's conception of the literary work. He suggests that the literary work must be allowed to "engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself." If the teacher is to invite his students to do that, then he or she must begin by asking them to formulate some impressions of those things they are to work out. In other words, the teacher needs to provide some time for the students to decide what their own perceptions, reactions, and questions are.

In an effort to do that, the teacher might simply ask students to take five to ten minutes, after reading the selection, to write down their reactions. It would be helpful, but not necessary, for the students to have had some previous experience with free and forced writing,[9] before applying it in the context of a literature lesson, so that they would feel more comfortable with the request that they write without stopping for several minutes. The task is simple—the teacher asks them, as soon as they have finished reading, to write whatever comes to mind, without censoring, without trying to be academic, without worrying about the correctness of either the perceptions recorded or the language in which it is recorded.

It may take some persuading to convince students that they are free to write what and how they wish in this activity, but for them to try to predict what the teacher might want, or to try to spell everything correctly and punctuate properly, would be to destroy the activity. The point, of which they must be convinced, is to identify what they see in the work, how they feel about it, what they think of it. Those thoughts and feelings are the substance out of which their understanding of the literature will be built.

The writing time should allow ideas to crystallize, some questions to arise, and some judgments to be formed—the teacher may expect those thoughts to support the discussion. Because they are asked to write first, with no preceding discussion, students will have to fall back upon their own resources. It is virtually inevitable that what they have to

say will reflect their own perceptions, their own interests. Except insofar as they have learned to mimic the voice and style and focus of teachers and critics, they will have nothing but their own impressions and responses to record. They will have been denied the easy response, "I think what he said." Their brief writings will thus provide a beginning point that lies equally in the literary work and in themselves, and the discussion that follows is consequently more likely to engage the readers' imagination, and to involve them in the active and creative reading that Iser hopes for.

The brief statements produced by the free-writing may then serve as the basis of discussion, which may be handled in any of several ways. One way is simply to begin, without further mention of the writing, by asking the students for their comments. It is likely that many of the students, because they have been given the time for thought, and the demand that they write, which forces them to capture the thoughts in words, will have something to say. It is also likely—or rather, inevitable—that, in a group of thirty or forty, different things will be said. They are different people, and they will have different backgrounds, attitudes, insights—the single work will not strike all of its readers in a single way.

The differences in response should often be enough to provoke interest, even with very little prodding from the teacher. When one student sees Macbeth as evil and corrupt and guilty, and another sees him as pitiably weak and manipulable and guiltless, they have reason to talk with one another. When one student condemns the brutality in "The New Kid" and another condones it, then again there is an issue to explore further. The juxtaposition of differing responses will fuel the talk. Out of those differing responses, a discussion that takes into consideration both the text and the uniqueness of the reader may grow.

A second strategy makes more overt use of the writings. Rather than simply depend upon them to force the crystallizing of ideas, they may be directly addressed by asking students to read their brief commentaries aloud, inviting observations and discussion after each. When several have been read, it is likely that some points of disagreement will have emerged, and again the discussion should be under way. It would not be appropriate to make the reading mechanical—the class need not be subjected to thirty recitations. Rather, enough of the papers should be read to fire the talk. When the discussion begins to flag, then it may be time to look at several more.

If students are shy about reading their comments, the teacher might prefer to collect them and flip through them,

reading aloud at random, or perhaps quickly selecting papers that seem likely to be provocative, until discussion has been stimulated. If the randomness of that approach disturbs the students, then the teacher might, alone, with the assistance of a small group, or in consultation with the whole class, identify the major issues raised in the collection of papers, and build from them an agenda for the class, allocating time for each question.

Perhaps one of the most effective ways of using the brief response statements is to place the students in groups of three to five to share them. They might read them aloud or pass the papers around. The sophistication of the group will dictate how much assistance the students will need with the discussion. They might, for instance, be asked to look for differences and similarities in their statements. Or, if the teacher thinks it necessary, he or she may raise more specific questions to guide the talk—do they have different feelings about the work? different perceptions of what takes place? different impressions of a character? different judgments of the work's quality? different impressions of the author's intention?

Relying upon the written responses of the students does several things for the teacher of literature. First of all, it forces his students to find some point of connection with the work, so that the personal element cannot be ignored. In so doing it allows the natural motivations of the reader to operate. Second, it provokes discussion, by eliciting different perceptions of the work. Third, it prevents the teacher from being distracted by the irrelevancies of the textbook's pedagogical paraphenalia. He or she cannot substitute the miscellaneous information about literature for the experience of reading when students have been invited to deal with the significance of the works. Hartman says that

> We can only urge that readers, inspired by hermeneutic traditions, take back some of their authority and become both creative and thoughtful, as in days of old.[10]

Students need to have a taste of that authority, so that they may begin to take responsibility for themselves, and for the vision of the world that they will either create for themselves out of their experiences, literary and otherwise, or absorb mindlessly from the prefabricated visions the culture is all too eager to offer them.

This rather lengthy discussion of the possibilities inherent in the response statement may suggest similar possible variations in some of the following patterns, which we will consider more briefly.

The response paper:

An obvious extension of the five-minute written response is the response paper. Bleich, in Readings and Feelings,[11] discusses the possibilities at length. The response paper is essentially an elaboration of the briefer statement, allowing the student time and space to reflect upon and develop the ideas that may be only vaguely and lightly touched in the shorter essay. Students must work up gradually to this, because the openness of the assignment will be intimidating at first.

The assignment, basically, is "Read, then write." As in the briefer writings, the purpose is to allow students to find, and then follow, their own paths through the literature. The assignment cannot be too specifically made, or it will constrain the students, telling them too much about what to say and how to say it.

In her work with secondary school students, Suzanne Howell has devised two structures for the response paper that she offers as suggestions, but not requirements, for her students. They provide more structure and direction than the completely free writing, but still allow the students a great deal of latitude. They are:

I

Part One.
Your immediate response to the story, organized more logically than random thoughts.
Part Two.
One element of your response developed, possibly,
a) some association that you make with the story—another story, etc.
b) a relevant personal experience
c) an idea that the story brings to mind
Part Three.
Come back to the story. What was it in the story that created this particular response in you?

II

Part One.
Your immediate response to the story, followed by questions raised in your mind by the story.
Part Two.
Your attempt to answer the questions, based on the story and on your own experience.

Part Three.
What effect do you think the writer wanted to create? What is there in the story that makes you think the writer was trying for this particular effect?

Some teachers, knowing how susceptible these children are to suggestions by teachers, may feel that the structure of the assignments is too confining, but Howell reports that the results of these assignments were extremely satisfying: "Engagement with the material resulted in papers which said something, and said it well."[12] Teachers may decide for themselves whether the more open request to write about responses, or the more tightly structured assignments Howell suggests, work better in their classroom.

As with the shorter writing, the students will be able to base their discussion upon the written statements they've produced. If time and finances allow, papers may be reproduced and distributed to the class. Discussion may then be organized in a variety of ways, according to the skills of the group and the inclinations of the teacher.

Immediate response:

Rosenblatt says that it is

> essential to scrutinize all practices to make sure that they provide the opportunity for an initial crystallization of a personal sense of the work.[13]

Written responses have the virtue of allowing time for the students to formulate their own impressions of the work, but in the interest of varying the procedures in the classroom it is occasionally appropriate to omit the writing and launch immediately into conversation about the work. When the teacher tries this approach, it may be helpful to rush the students a bit, asking them quickly for their immediate reactions to the work read. If they are willing to play a free-association game during the first several minutes of the discussion, they may spill out enough ideas to sustain the talk for the rest of the period.

Calling for immediate, unconsidered response is probably most useful in dealing with very short works—poems or stories that can be read aloud and discussed within one class period. Longer works, demanding time outside of class, do not submit to this technique, unless, of course, the teacher wishes to select a short passage for the focus of discussion.

Associational response:

One of the most powerful techniques is to present a short work (or selection from a longer work) that seems likely to stimulate reflections on related personal experiences, and then to direct the students to recall that experience. One such activity, devised by Anne Turner, invites students to read from A Separate Peace a passage dealing with the difficulties of expressing feelings.

Finny has said that Gene is his best friend, and Gene reflects that,

> It was a courageous thing to say. Exposing a sincere emotion nakedly like that at the Devon School was the next thing to suicide. I should have told him then that he was my best friend also and rounded off what he had said. I started to; I nearly did. But something held me back. Perhaps I was stopped by that level of feeling, deeper than thought, which contains the truth.[14]

It is a moving passage, and one with which the students are likely to have associations—few people have said everything they wished to say throughout their lives.

Ms. Turner asks the students, after reading the passage to them, to recall something they always wanted to tell someone, but had not been able to say. She provides several prompting questions:

> Why didn't you tell them?
> What is your relationship with this person?
> Why do you want to tell them?
> How would they feel or react if you did tell them?
> How would you feel if you did tell them?
> Would your telling them change, or would it have changed, your relationship with the person?

Then she asks the students to write about the situation they have recalled, and then to discuss it in small groups. Finally, she asks them to relate the memory to the situation in A Separate Peace.

The personal association called to mind by the passage and the questions, especially when it is written about and discussed, seems to deepen and sharpen the understanding of that section of the book. It is, of course, possible to confuse the

feelings produced by one's own memories with those evoked by the text, or those represented in the text, but the discussion can address that problem. The blending of past and present, remembered and evoked, is inevitable, regardless—it is only our access to similar feelings that enable us to understand those represented in print.

Bleich's sequence:

In his work with college students, Bleich has devised a sequence of activities to guide his students through the reading of a literary work. Although he speaks of spending a great deal of time at each of the four stages, it is possible to compress them, and make of his four steps a single plan. Thus modified, the steps are these:

> Perceptions: At this stage, students are asked to concentrate upon paraphrase, to simply describe what they observe in the work. It is helpful to ask them first to write, and then to talk, so that they may be as little swayed by another's perceptions as possible.
>
> Impressions: There are two parts in this step. The first is to identify the feelings aroused by the work—the "affect." The second is to recall the associations one makes with the work, much as a student would do in Turner's activity.
>
> Discussion of importance: Here the student is asked to consider,
>
> > the most important word,
> > the most important passage, and
> > the most important aspect.
>
> One issue that arises, predictably, is the definition of "important"—what it means depends upon the individual and the context.
>
> Community interpretation: At this point the question becomes, What assumptions and perceptions does the group share, and how do individuals vary from one another in their perspectives and interpretations?

Bleich argues that the validity of the sequence lies in its movement "from the most primitive, automatic, and unconscious experiences to the most complex and lately developed

capacities--intellectual and communal thought and interaction."[15]

Strict paraphrase:

For students who are too inclined to try predicting the teacher's desired reply, Mandel suggests establishing ground-rules for discussion that allow students to respond by "telling only what you see in the work."[16] Students thus are not interpreting, but rather are expounding on their "direct experience" of the work. The differences in perceptions, even without interpretive statements, are sufficient to sustain the discussion. He also incorporates the Rogerian discussion pattern that requires students to paraphrase the remarks of the preceding speaker before embarking on their own, to ensure that students are hearing one another.

The obvious value of this kind of discussion of the literary work is that it eliminates any reward for intuiting the teacher's view, or for guessing the correct critical estimate of the work. It instead lends validity to transaction between reader and text--an experience created by the student, or as Mandel says, "a moment fully lived in the presence of the artist's creativity...."[17] While giving credence to non-interpretive responses, it at the same time demands, or invites, a return to the text to explain the source for what the student sees.

Though Mandel uses this technique, which he admits is artificial, throughout his entire course, most teachers might find such tightly constrained discussion more useful as an occasional technique, rather than as the format for a full quarter's work. Its proscription of inferential statements, though useful in forcing students to attend to their perceptions as well as to their thoughts, may seem too confining for more than a day or two at a time.

Defining the question:

If Mandel's technique forbids inference, a pattern suggested by Richard Adler demands it. Adler suggests that every story leaves the reader with unanswered questions. He comments that

> For too long we have tended to ask students questions, bypassing their questions. Their responses become responses to our questions, not to the work. If we structure the focus for discussion, role playing, or

> writing, we gamble that their questions and concerns are the same as ours.[18]

Believing, as Iser does, that all students should be given opportunities for establishing their own connections with the literature, rather than simply obligated to hear about the connections scholars have made, Adler asks students to make lists of questions they feel are left unanswered in the story.

These lists are either shared immediately and discussed within the class or used as possible writing assignments. For instance, after reading a mythological tale, "Echo and Narcissus," Adler's readers posed the question, "What was the story Echo told Hera to detain her?" This question could elicit a short discussion of possibilities for story lines, an oral narrative developed by groups of students, or, as with Adler's class, a written story developed by one group of students.

Patterns of discussion:

Mandel, in Literature and the English Department, suggests another technique, which is simply to place the responsibility for the substance of the class on the students:

> Each class meeting would take the direction of some student's particular interest that day. Never would I set the discussion going in a direction suitable to my own ends.[19]

Although the uncertainties of that strategy are apparent to anyone who has waited desperately, through agonizing, interminable silences, for students to respond to a simple question, it has the merit of placing responsibility for identifying important issues upon the students.

Regardless of how the talk is begun—with brief writings, with extended essays, or with immediate responses, there are several possibilities for varying the discussions. One procedure that has worked well for some teachers is to begin with pairs. They are asked to talk about either the work or the written responses to the work for a brief time, and then the pairs are joined into groups of four. The issues discussed in each pair are then presented to the larger group. With luck, the pairs will have different ideas to share with one another, and the discussion in the group of four will move beyond the original talk.

Then the groups of four are combined into groups of eight, and the cycle is repeated. Here, talk becomes more difficult. The individual students have had some time to clarify and defend their opinions, and they may have become intransigent. The differences that have arisen in the separated groups may become clearer and more difficult to resolve.

Finally, the entire class is pulled together for the concluding analysis of the work. The differing responses to and interpretations of the work may be articulated as fully as possible, and though it is important not to expect or demand consensus, it is satisfying to reach some conception of the issues that have interested the group and the various stands taken by individuals within it. The purpose of the work is not to achieve unanimity or conformity, but to help individual readers determine their own perspectives--to help them take back their authority and responsibility for their own reading.

The making of knowledge:

What students conclude about a literary work will influence the way they see the world, and that, ultimately must be their own responsibility. What transpires in the classroom when discussions are conducted with respect for the individual's perceptions, for the work itself, and for the social process of sharing and building upon one another's ideas will be consistent with Bleich's vision of the school:

> ...the purpose of pedagogical institutions from the nursery through the university is to synthesize knowledge rather than to pass it along....[20]

Response-based teaching of literature encourages that making of knowledge. It invites students to find their own connections with the literary work, to respond to it honestly and freely, to examine those responses with as much intellectual energy as they can muster, and to communicate as fully as they can with their colleagues. The literature, dealing as it does with the significant events of human life, can then provide the material and experience from which the child's vision of human possibilities may be constructed.

Notes

[1]Mario J. Valdes, "Toward a Structure of Criticism," New Literary History (vol. 3, #2), Winter 1972, p. 278.

[2]See, for instance, the 8th Yearbook of Comparative Criticism, Theories of Literary Genre, edited by Joseph P. Strelka (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978).

[3]Robert Scholes, Semiotics and Interpretation. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 15.

[4]See, for instance, Frank Lentricchia's After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). An excellent brief survey of some of the current schools of critical theory is the Introduction to Jane P. Tompkins' Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). Chapter one of Scholes' book is also an excellent and very brief summation of recent developments.

[5]Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication from Bunyan to Beckett. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, p. 275.

[6]Eleanor Duckworth, "The Having of Wonderful Ideas," Harvard Educational Review, (vol. 42, no. 2), May, 1972, p. 217.

[7]David Elkind, "What Does Piaget Say to the Teacher?" Today's Education, November, 1972, p. 48.

[8]Ibid.

[9]See Ken Macrorie, Writing To Be Read. New York: Hayden Book Company, 1968.

[10]Geoffrey H. Hartman, Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, p. 161.

[11]David Bleich, Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1975.

[12]Suzanne Howell, "Unlocking the Box: An Experiment in Literary Response," English Journal, (vol. 66, no. 2), February, 1977, p. 41.

[13]Louise Rosenblatt, Literature as Exploration. New York: Noble and Noble, 1976, p. 69.

[14]John Knowles, A Separate Peace. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1959, p. 38.

[15]David Bleich, Readings and Feelings, p. 5.

[16]Barrett John Mandel, "Text and Context in the Teaching of Literature," English Journal, (vol. 68, no. 9), December, 1979, p. 43.

[17]Ibid., p. 44.

[18]Richard Adler, "Answering the Unanswered Questions," Re-Vision: Classroom Practices in Teaching English, 1974-1975, ed. by Allen Berger and Blanche Hope Smith. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1974, p. 72.

[19]Barrett John Mandel, Literature and the English Department. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1970, p. 51.

[20]David Bleich, Subjective Criticism. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 133.

A READER-RESPONSE APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

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If our fundamental concern as English teachers is our students, to get "back to the basics" we are compelled to provide a curriculum built around student needs and interests. If our major goals as teachers are to help students learn how to learn, to help them become self-fulfilled individuals and self-reliant readers, writers and thinkers, these goals are best achieved in an English classroom that stresses the affective as well as cognitive aspects of learning. These goals are best achieved in a classroom that is experience-based and in a state of flux as students participate together in the learning process. Recent rhetorical criticism acknowledges the needs of the reader; it therefore helps teachers of literature to understand the literary experiences of our student readers. Wolfgang Iser and Louise Rosenblatt are two theorists who base their critical procedures on rhetorical theories that emphasize reader response, rather than the author's intention in a work, or the adequacy of a text. By applying their reader-response theory to an often-used text, I hope to show the value of using this procedure to teach literature in the student-centered classroom.

I
The Rationale

The rationale behind a reader-response approach to teaching literature lies in certain assumptions about learning which emphasize the needs of students rather than those of teachers and administrators. First is the assumption that students are curious about their surroundings and bring this self-perpetuating curiosity and desire to learn into the classroom.

Instead of blunting this curiosity, as is so often done in school, teachers should build upon this natural desire to learn. Learning best takes place in a non-threatening atmosphere in which students can be creative, can explore, question, and share ideas. Significant learning also takes place when self-evaluation is more important than teacher-evaluation and when students are responsible for their participation in the learning process. Furthermore, learning is acquired best by doing, and the most lasting and pervasive learning is that which involves the feelings as well as the intellect. Finally, learning is a dynamic process, and learning the process of learning helps students become open to experience and the process of change.

What implications do these assumptions about learning have for the teaching of literature in the secondary English classroom? Certainly they suggest that we focus on process and on the student rather than the subject, and on the reader rather than the text. Because Iser and Rosenblatt are concerned with the reader who experiences the literary work and with the interaction between text and reader, their theories are appropriate for teaching literature in the student-centered English classroom.

II
The Theories

Both Rosenblatt and Iser consider reading a creative activity and a dynamic process, an experience which occurs at a particular time and place in which the reader conditions and is conditioned by the text. According to Iser, a successful reading experience is one in which the reader is an active participant in the process, recreating in the imagination the world presented by the text. This process is not smooth and continuous, but frequently interrupted by "gaps" in the text which invite the reader to interact. That which is implied in the text engages the reader's imagination and makes him or her a participant in the reading event. In fiction, for example, the reader is given access to the text by the narrator, characters, and plot which guide and channel him or her, suggesting what should be visualized. From this textual structure the fluent reader goes through a process of anticipation and retrospection, gaining new information and modifying expectations as he or she reads.

The interruptions in the text confronted during the process can be surprises for the fluent reader, who responds by drawing on his or her horizon of accumulated information to bridge the gaps and modify expectations as the reading continues. More often than not, teachers are faced with students who are not fluent readers and who do not always have successful reading experiences. When a basic reader encounters an interruption in the process, he or she may become confused or frustrated and choose not to respond. As teachers of literature we need to be aware of those points in the text that can be potential sources of frustration or confusion for the student and help insure that they are points where he or she interacts with the text. We cannot, of course, anticipate all the gaps for our students, but by helping them respond at crucial points, we can at least facilitate the process and provide for their participation in it.

Iser is primarily concerned with fiction and does not suggest a pedagogical application of his theory, but his description of the reading process is valuable in helping teachers locate and prevent potential problems in a student's reading activity. Like Iser, Rosenblatt sees the reader as an active participant in the literary experience, which she defines as a "transaction" between the text and reader. According to Rosenblatt, the process of reading involves first responding to linguistic cues and adopting either an efferent or aesthetic stance to the work (an efferent stance is one in which the reader approaches the text concerned primarily with what information can be carried away from the reading, whereas an aesthetic stance is one in which the reader approaches the text primarily concerned with what is experienced during the reading activity). The reader then develops organizing principles or a "framework" which guides him or her through the text; different literary genres make their own kinds of conventional demands on the reader, but past literary experiences are "subliminal guides" which indicate what genre to expect and what details and patterns to look for. This framework arouses expectations that are fulfilled, reinforced or frustrated, requiring perhaps a revision of the framework and a rereading which stimulates further expectation. Finally, from the organizing activity of the reader, the text is decoded and the final synthesis achieved. Below, for comparison, are Iser's and Rosenblatt's paradigms of the reading process:

ISER (The structured act of reading)	ROSENBLATT
(1) The reader enters the text through the narrator, characters, and plot, channels which guide and control him or her during the process.	(1) The reader responds to cues in the text and adopts an efferent or aesthetic stance.
(2) The structured act of reading is generated by gaps in the text which invite the reader to respond.	(2) The reader develops a tentative framework or organizing principles which guide him or her through the text.
(3) The reader assembles meaning during a process of anticipation and retrospection, as new information (theme) is viewed against old information (horizon), causing him or her to modify expectations.	(3) This arouses expectations that are fulfilled, reinforced, or frustrated.
(4) The goal of the reading experience, finding coherence and consistency in the text, is achieved.	(4) This perhaps requires revision of the framework and rereading which stimulates further expectation.
	(5) Finally, due to the organizing activity of the reader, the text is decoded and the final synthesis achieved.

Rosenblatt's paradigm for the reading process is noticeably similar to Iser's. For both, reading is a process in which expectation functions to propel the reader through the text. For Iser, the reader interacts with the text by filling in the gaps which interrupt the process. Likewise, for Rosenblatt, the transaction between text and reader involves the reader's drawing from his or her own resources to fill in the gaps, or to realize the "blueprint" which the text provides. Both theorists see the reading process as controlled by the text, but factors outside the text also determine reader response. Iser says that the manner in which a reader responds to the text depends on his or her disposition. Although any response to the text is partly subjective, the text does restrict those responses. Rosenblatt suggests that the reader brings to the literary experience his or her own background of experiences and memories, a moral, social and psychological code, a unique world view, and a particular physical and emotional condition,

all of which help to determine response. Experiencing the literary work involves synthesizing these emotions and attitudes with what the literary text offers.

III
Classroom Application

Therefore, our emphasis as teachers of literature should be on the transaction between text and reader, and our aim to improve the quality of our students' literary experiences. Since the transaction between reader and text involves evoking those components of experience to which the text refers, teachers must know their students and understand their backgrounds and personalities. Teachers must also know the literary materials, so that they can select from a wide range of literature which appeals to the needs and interests of the students. Acting as initiators and guides through the process of inductive learning, rather than imposing artificial patterns on students, teachers should allow students to develop insight stimulated by their own feelings and curiosity about literary experience. To foster fruitful transaction, understanding and growth, teachers need to create a setting which stimulates spontaneity and leads toward participation with the literary work. In an atmosphere that is not threatening to them, students should be allowed to respond freely to what they read and be encouraged to share their responses with each other, so that the literary experience can mean something personal to them. This favorable atmosphere also initiates a process whereby students can clarify and enlarge their own responses built on their personal reactions to the experience of a literary work. The teacher can help students combine their subjective responses with what they want to say to others by having them express their feelings orally and in writing before, during, and after their reading. Each experience with a literary work can then enhance students' further reading experiences.

The reader-response approach used in the following classroom assignment is geared particularly for basic readers who often have trouble participating in a literary event, and it considers these characteristics of primary importance:

> (1) The teacher must take into consideration this reading process of anticipation and retrospection that is constantly interrupted by gaps which invite reader response.

(2) The teacher must allow for personal response to a literary work without artificially imposing patterns so that students' feelings and experiences are elicited by the text.

(3) The teacher must allow students to share their responses openly with each other.

(4) The teacher must direct students to develop their responses in order to enhance future reading experience.

The novel Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck is an appropriate literary experience for high school students because it is concerned with the advantages and risks of a close friendship. Because of its readability, it is especially appropriate for basic readers. To set the stage for a spontaneous approach to the novel, the teacher may begin with an informal discussion that arouses students' curiosity about the story before they read. The following questions serve as interest generators:

(1) What does the title mean to you? What questions do you ask yourself about the story when you read the title? or what do you wonder about the story when you read the title?

(2) (If the book has an illustrated cover) What kind of people do the two men on the cover look like? What do you think their relationship is?

Questions like these can arouse students' curiosity about the characters so that they will read to answer their questions. After reading aloud the introduction in the first three pages of chapter one, the teacher can discuss with the students how well their expectations were met so far. Where does the story take place? Who are George and Lennie and what are they like? How are they different from each other? These questions help students modify their expectations made before reading and encourage them to continue reading the first chapter. As long as students are reading with expectations, they are motivated to continue reading the story. Problems can arise when students are making expectations based only on information or feelings outside the story, or don't respond appropriately to cues in the text; then they become frustrated or confused by information that they do not understand. Having students respond in writing as well as orally during their reading gets them to objectify their subjective responses to a work and to synthesize their personal feelings and experiences with what is actually in the text. By keeping a written journal before, during and after reading, students are helped to develop

insights stimulated by their own feelings and curiosity about literature, and the journal gives them a record of their reading experience in the form of notes which can be expanded in their later writing about the book. Since a misreading is due to the reader's misleading expectations, the journal also provides a helpful record of students' responses written while reading for the teacher to observe.

The number of times the reading is interrupted to write responses should be determined by how experienced the students are as readers; fluent readers often resent too many interruptions during their reading, while non-fluent readers often need to have discussed points of a text that give them problems, so as to prevent confusion later in the book. The teacher needs to be sensitive to the students' need to share their responses with each other and to encourage spontaneous discussion about the book. The following questions were designed for basic and general high school juniors, some who had never read a complete novel before. Students were asked at the end of each chapter to write responses to what they had read, as well as make predictions about future chapters. Two samples of student responses follow each set of questions:

Response Number One (end of Chapter 1)--Respond to Lennie and George. What is their relationship like? What do you think of them? Where are they headed? Why?

> (A) My feelings about Lennie and George are that they don't seem to get along good without one another. When one is gone, the other would be completely lost. Their relationship is tit-for-tat. Like, one almost isn't bright as the other. Lennie is slightly slow. He forgets everything. George usually would have to remind Lennie of just about everything. They were headed a few miles south of Soledad to a ranch because they were hoping to get a job.
>
> (B) I feel that Lennie and George are a good pair because George understands Lennie's problem and tries to help him get along through life, and he helps him when Lennie gets hisself in trouble, and tries to keep him a job. They are headed to find a job. And try to make a living for themselves and find a house or a ranch.

Response Number Two (end of Chapter 2)--Respond to these characters: Curly, Curly's wife, Slim, Candy. Do you feel any tension between any of the characters? What do you think may happen?

(A) I dislike Curly because he has a very bad attitude and I dislike his wife because she tries to flirt even though she's married. Slim thinks that he is cool. And I can't tell you much about Candy.

(B) Curly is a guy who likes to tangle because he always picks on guys who are bigger than him. Curly's wife act like she want the guys that stay in the bunk she always walking around giving everybody the eye. Slim is a guy who stands out in a crowd. Candy is a friendly guy who loves his dog. He doesn't have a family or anything. I like Curly's wife because she make the fellows in the bunk house think about ladies and she makes them angry sometimes and she makes me laugh. I dislike Curly because he thinks he a bully and he's always going to pick on Lennie.

Response Number Three (end of Chapter 3)—Write your response to the killing of Candy's dog. Why does Candy say he should have killed the dog himself? Do you believe in mercy killings for animals? for humans?

(A) I would call the death of Candy's dog a "mercy killing" because he was killed because he was old and was no use for anyone. Even though he had the dog when he was a pup, he felt that he should have killed him hisself. I don't believe in mercy killing for anybody because I don't believe in taking other peoples' lives. That's not right.

(B) I believe Candy's dog was getting old and out of feeling and they didn't want to see the dog suffer. He was killed because he wasn't no good to no one, he didn't have no teeth, he stinks and was old and suffering. But Candy said he ought to have killed the dog because he felt that he should have not let a stranger kill the dog. I believe in mercy killings for animals but not for humans.

Response Number Four (end of Chapter 4)—Who is Crooks? Why is he lonely? What are his and some of the other characters' dreams for the future and how do they compare to yours?

(A) The Negro stable buck is Crooks. He is black and he is left out of the rest of the ranchers. Crooks and Lennie are alike because they both seem to be rather slow. Candy, George and Lennie dreamed of owning their own land so they could hire anybody they wanted, and fire whoever they wanted. Their dream was important too because they

would be working for themselves. My dream of the future is also to be successful.

(B) Crooks is a negro who is a stablebuck, he lives in a barn away from the other guys. He has a crooked spine. He was neat and a pretty aloof man. He kept his distance and demanded others keep theirs. Because most of the ranchers around are owned by white people and there were no colored men on the ranches. Lennie and George want to find them a small place, piece of land that they can call their own. Candy wanted to join up with Lennie and George because he had no family and he didn't want to be lonely. Because that's the only things that they are hoping for.

Response Number Five (end of Chapter 5)—Write your response to the killing in the barn. How does your reaction compare to Candy's? George's? Curly's? Who, if anyone, do you think is to blame? What do you think is going to happen?

(A) Curly's wife's neck was accidently broken by Lennie. Because she was talking about how soft her hair was and she let Lennie touch it. She started screaming when Lennie got to handling her hair too ruff. Lennie tried to keep her from screaming and panics. The ranchers are anxious to find Lennie.

(B) The killing in the barn surprised me because I thought that Lennie was not ever gonna associate with her in the beginning. It happened because he panic because he began stroking her head too hard and she began to cry and scream and he panic and began shaking her until all of a sudden her neck broke. No, because she had no business around him she ought to know better. Yes, because anytime someone takes the life of another they are at fault.

Response Number Six (end of Chapter 6)—Write your response to the killing in the last chapter. Does George make the right decision? Why or why not?

(A) Lennie goes to the brush because he remembers what George told him to do if he got in to any trouble. Lennie was shot by George. George makes the right decision to shoot Lennie because if he didn't shoot Lennie, Curly would have shot him.

(B) Lennie goes to the brush because he doesn't forget what George told him when he gets into trouble (go to the brush and hide). After Candy sees that Curly's wife is laying dead he goes and tells George and then they go and find Lennie to kill him but instead George finds him and shoots him because he didn't want to see Lennie tormented. No, I don't think he made the right decision because who is he to make the decision to kill another person or not.

The totally different responses made to Curly's wife in Response Number Two do not indicate a misreading, but different attitudes brought to the literary experience from the readers' personal experiences. However, in response to Number Four, Student A reveals a misreading of the text when she says, "Crooks and Lennie are alike because they both seem to be rather slow." She has mistakenly equated Lennie's intellectual deficiencies with Crook's isolation. Crooks is, in fact, as evidenced by the books he keeps in his room, the only one on the ranch who is well-read, and this student's misreading could keep her from perceiving the prejudice of the ranchers and understanding their subsequent descrimination against Lennie at the end of the book. The same student, nevertheless, was able to synthesize her personal feelings with the text, as her later response illustrates. She writes in response to Number Three: "I don't believe in mercy killing for anybody because I don't believe in taking other peoples' lives. That's not right." She readjusts her personal feelings about mercy killing in Response Number Six where she makes allowances for the shooting in the novel: "George makes the right decision to shoot Lennie." She has allowed her personal feelings to be controlled by the text. Although Student B maintains in accordance with her feelings that George was wrong to shoot Lennie, she has not misread the text and does recognize that his actions were motivated by love.

These written student responses serve not only as records for the teacher, but also as notes for the students to help them with their later writing. One such writing assignment built on their written responses might be to have students write a defense of George Milton to a jury explaining why he is innocent of cold-blooded murder. Students would be required to re-examine the story in light of Lennie's and George's relationship so as to support George's act of love.

IV
Summary

Both Iser and Rosenblatt define reading as an activity in which the reader seeks a coherent experience, and both describe it in non-evaluative terms. Because the reader's structured responses to the text "make the poem", each reading is individual; however, these responses are controlled by the text. The individual memories and feelings that are evoked in each reader differ in each case, and it is crucial to their experience of the story that they are encouraged. However, the students' attention must be directed back to the text on which their responses are based, so that there is convergence between the text and reader at the end (Iser), or a decoding of the text and final synthesis (Rosenblatt). Participation of the students is encouraged through their written and oral responses all through the reading process. This method helps provide an inductive process of learning which draws personal response from students and refers them to the text to support their response; it also allows them to review their reading and reflect on what they have read, as well as synthesize details to reinterpret their previous sense of things in light of their literary experience. The reader-response approach to teaching literature is a pedagogically sound one. It focuses on the needs and interests of the student and approaches learning as a process. It is, in summary, a valid approach crucial to the student-centered English classroom.

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ENHANCING RESPONSE TO LITERATURE: AN INSERVICE APPROACH

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"The 'separate but equal' idea of writing and literature has been my practice in the past but the results of separate topic assignments have never been as good as I had hoped. My experiences with integration of these aspects has been limited to textbook ideas and I am anxious to develop some of my own."

—an eleventh-grade English teacher

"Most beneficial to me would be learning new or different methods used in teaching literature and ways to apply them to my own situation. What goes on in the classroom is my central concern. I would enjoy seeing real interaction between students and literature in my class."

—an eighth grade language arts teacher

"I believe that the literature of a culture reflects the thinking of its people and that a knowledge of literature affects the development of values and philosophy. I am continually seeking better ways of presenting and integrating literature into the academic process."

—a tenth grade English teacher

These Kentucky and Ohio secondary school English teachers were concerned that their literature teaching had become arid. They and their students wanted something more than an assignment to "take out your anthologies and read the next twelve pages of The Deerslayer." They wanted more than questions asking, "What is the setting?" "Can you summarize the plot?" or "How would you describe the main character?"

These teachers craved ideas for teaching literature that provoked students to make connections between their lives and the literature they read. They sought methods that capitalized upon what they knew was the inter-dependence of literature, composition, and language study. Most of all, they were looking for techniques that would work in their remedial, honors, or heterogeneously grouped classes.

With the assistance of twelve secondary school English teachers and five secondary school administrators, we planned a summer inservice institute that would address these needs. We made application for financial support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and when we received word that we had been funded, we went to work.

Applications for the five-week program were solicited from throughout the northern Kentucky, southern Ohio, and southeastern Indiana regions. After reviewing letters of application and holding on-campus interviews, we accepted twenty-five eager, experienced (at least three years of teaching), articulate professionals into the program. Here are some principles for enhancing student response to literature which those teachers discovered from their readings, from eleven workshop presenters, and from each other:

1. Use writing to understand literature. Workshop presenters Judith Bechtel and Frances Zaniello stressed that students gain insight into whatever literature they read through writing. By responding in a journal assignment or through a short, in-class paper to associations called forth by poetry, prose, or drama, students can make legitimate connections between their experiences and the meaning of a text.

Institute participants' responses to Nikki Giovanni's "Legacies," about a granddaughter's refusal to allow her grandmother to teach her how to bake rolls, highlighted the varied interpretations available to students. One teacher associated the poem with her own grandmother, wishing she had accepted proffered wisdom when the woman was still alive. Another suggested that the communication gap between the older and younger women reminded her of tough days with her own tenth graders. Two others associated the poem's central experience with male relatives who had been influential early in their lives. One remembered her disinterest in her Polish ancestry until too late--a pain which she still associates with her grandparents' deaths. All the participants' responses grew from their personal knowledge and experience; yet each was true to the text.

These initial responses led participants to coherent oral discourse which, in turn, called forth more coherent oral response. The stimulating discussion which resulted from writing and then sharing personal response to literature provided an important example of the power of reader-response techniques in the literature classroom.

2. Break out of the canon, occasionally. When teachers mentioned classes that they felt had gone stale, they always also mentioned works deemed part of the traditional literary canon. Worthwhile as they insisted Silas Marner, The Scarlet Letter, and Return of the Native were, institute members were searching for stimulating works rarely taught in secondary schools to intersperse throughout the required curriculum.

Participants were introduced to sources of regional, autobiographical literature (e.g., a Civil War letter from a young girl to her aunt in Boone County, Kentucky; a journal kept by a turn-of-the century woman whose family lived in the Ohio River communities of St. Joseph, Ohio, and Ludlow, Kentucky; a lighthearted account of a visitor's stopovers in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Covington, Kentucky, in 1844). They were directed to literature having particular appeal to adolescents and written by Japanese-Americans (e.g., Jeanne Wakutsuki Houston and James D. Houston's Farewell to Manzanar), Jewish-Americans (e.g., Chaim Potok's The Chosen), and Southern American women (e.g., Sue Ellen Bridgers' Home Before Dark). They reaffirmed their sense of the power of literature to increase social sensitivity by experiencing contemporary American women writers, including: Leslie Marmon Silko (Native American); Teru Kanazawa (Asian American); Ana Castillo (Chicana); Lucille Clifton (Black); and Linda Pastan (Jewish). Having learned of the many non-traditional selections available and accessible to secondary students, these teachers sought more noncanonical works with which to expand their students' and their own personal and literary horizons.

3. Use small group activities to get students sharing responses. From speech and communications specialist Stephen Boyd, institute members learned how to organize small groups so as to encourage student decision-making, participation, and active listening. In addition, the Kentucky and Ohio teachers discovered they should (1) know their students before using groups (mingling "cheerleaders" with peacemakers and decision makers), (2) specify the goals of group work before it begins (providing topics suitable for a variety of purposes, whether problem solving, enlightenment, or ventilation of feelings), and (3) establish at the outset workable group norms for constructive peer interaction as well as definite time limits to provide closure.

Putting small-group theory into practice, Sally Jacobsen led a workshop in response to scientific literature. Working in groups of four to six people, participants reacted to Stephen Jay Gould's essay, "On Human Babies as Embryos" by answering one of three questions: (1) What associations does this essay comparing human with primate gestation call forth? (2) How might you help students deal with the content, particularly the scientific concepts, in this piece? (3) What sorts of problems do you envision in teaching this essay (e.g., censorship because of what might be interpreted as the author's Darwinian bias, specialized vocabulary unfamiliar to some students, pupil disinterest in the topic)? Each group appointed a reporter who related the group's findings to the institute after twenty minutes of discussion. The result was a variety of cogently expressed reactions to a provocative essay. The teachers agreed that the carefully structured small group approach not only yielded many thoughtful responses to a single work of literature, but also would help students improve speaking and listening skills.

4. Bring the other humanities to bear upon literature. Participants admitted that they had long accepted the dictum that "literature is art." Three workshop presenters took them beyond that simple statement to more complex comparisons between "written art" and other humanistic endeavors. Robert Wallace and Robert Rhode helped participants make explicit connections between music and literature as well as between art and literature. Teachers were invited to consider, for example, the comparative facility with which the artist Goya and writer Poe manipulated aspects of their crafts to create chilling, provocative art works.

Taking a similar tack, Thomas Zaniello encouraged institute members to examine differences and similarities in the techniques of narration as expressed through film and literature. Zaniello directed workshop participants to: (1) view a short film, "Death of a Peasant"; (2) divide a sheet of paper into two columns, one headed, "What does the narrative film do that a short story could not?" the other headed, "What would a short story have that the narrative film did not?"; (3) write down items under each column and share them in discussion with other workshop members. From this sharing there developed a lively discussion in which participants made astute observations about film's power to bring motion and color to fiction and about fiction's ability to convey a sense of the narrator's persona in ways that many films do not. Through these sessions on music, art, and film, the secondary teachers discovered the power of the arts to enrich student lives as they sharpen literary response.

5. Help students understand the assumptions they bring to literature. David Bishop, an expert in the psychology of reading, showed teachers how we all bring "schema," or sets of assumptions about how given events unfold, to our reading. Thus, we assume Western novels will involve a good guy/bad guy confrontation, or sports fiction will call for the main character to overcome odds to "win the game." When these schema are lacking, as with traditional works such as Silas Marner, The Scarlet Letter, or Return of the Native, participants learned that they could help by asking students to write about what they imagine life would be like in a different time or place and by providing short accounts from period newspapers or diaries to present a context for a work.

Challenging pre-established schema as they read also can help students learn about language and about themselves. To do this, students might be given the beginning of a story, asked to write out a "plausible" conclusion and then to contrast this with the actual ending of the literary work. Or, students might list beliefs about a particular situation (e.g., "When police and criminals meet, a high speed chase will follow," or "When movie actors gain fame and fortune, they will invariably become miserable, isolated souls.").

Working from this principle of prescripted response, workshop presenter Michael Wiesner showed how great detective fiction writers, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, play upon readers' expectations. By examining such fiction, students can develop understanding of the logic behind the construction of a tight mystery plot and also learn to question some of the stereotypes (the American "tough guy" detective; the dotty old woman sleuth) that such fiction may sometimes reinforce. By helping students discover and confront schema before studying literature, workshop participants believed they could promote more active, more involved reading.

6. Challenge assumptions about what is knowable in literature. One of our guest consultants, David Bleich (author of Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism, Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1975) asked participants to write what they thought Ernest Hemingway was trying to accomplish in the short story, "Hills Like White Elephants." In response, almost every teacher wrote a formal essay ascribing such motives to the author as a desire to show the power of men over women or to show the essential isolation of human beings. Bleich pointed out that we really cannot know Hemingway's motives. Instead, we bring to our interpretations the noble attributes we wish to ascribe to published authors.

Another Bleich assignment, this one a seemingly straightforward request to retell the Hemingway story, brought forth a more informal set of responses, many of which included personal associations and experiences informing individuals' perceptions of the work. In essence, the teachers learned that they, like their students, bring their own experiences to bear upon literature even when asked to tell only the facts. Such idiosyncratic retelling from within a class makes for a rich collection of reader response to engender discussion. For, it brings to response what students actually can know about literature, their experiential associations with particular works.

7. Define the purpose for reading. In her book, The Reader, The Text, The Poem (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), Louise Rosenblatt, our second guest consultant, identified two ways of reading a text: "efferent"—reading for key concepts and factual detail—and "aesthetic"—reading to experience a range of sensations identified with response to a moving work of art. Too often, Rosenblatt argued, students are commanded by their teachers to approach literature efferently. Pupils read to find out plot, setting, and characters, while missing out on the aesthetic delights that the language and artistry of Shakespeare, Austen, or Dickinson can provide. To develop this aesthetic awareness is a prime responsibility of secondary English teachers—indeed an underlying reason for the existence of a response to literature institute and its varied workshops.

Participant reaction to the intensive summer program was strongly positive. Most institute members believed that they had garnered practical methods for revitalizing literature instruction. One teacher spoke for participants and institute administrators alike when she asserted that the intellectual stimulation was "almost overwhelming at times." However, all participants agreed with the high school veteran who reflected that the inservice program had "been a period of reaffirming many techniques, rearranging many techniques, and renewing the enthusiasm of this teacher."

And, how did the eighth-, tenth-, and eleventh-grade teachers looking for ways to enhance their junior and senior high literature classes fare with their own institute projects? The eighth-grade teacher, concerned with "seeing real interaction between students and literature," developed response-centered lessons on "Heroes/Heroines and Heroism," for use with her junior high school's paired English/history classes. The tenth-grade teacher, interested in the cultural value of

literature, planned a Shakespeare festival complete with student productions, student filming of scenes from Romeo and Juliet and Julius Caesar, showings of filmed versions of Othello and Taming of the Shrew, and a Shakespearean "dress up day" with students coming to school attired as specific characters. The eleventh-grade teacher, concerned with integrating writing and literature, worked on ways of doing just that. She developed a series of short, high-interest writing assignments for students to complete and discuss before, during and after reading works required in her American literature course. Other institute members developed plans for enhancing student response to ancient, medieval, twentieth-century, tragic, poetic, and other categories of literature--using art, the media, and music; using journals; using pre-reading written response, intra-reading associative and anticipatory responses, and post-reading reaction papers and peer group interaction to share meanings.

Participants are trying out these ideas this school year. All of us will meet for inservice "reunions" in the fall and spring. We will tell what methods have worked well and suggest which ones need revision before they can be successful. There may even be time to share recollections of an often fatiguing, yet always exciting summer's quest for ways to enhance student response to literature.

FROM RESPONSE TO ANALYSIS: STRATEGIES FOR INVOLVING STUDENTS IN THINKING ABOUT LITERATURE

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One of the most difficult problems we confront as literature teachers involves ensuring that our students learn the skills necessary for perceptive responses to complex literature. Daily in the classroom we strive to avoid the pitfalls of treating immediate responses to the surface of a literary work as if they represented full understanding, or of stifling spontaneity in the name of rigorous analysis. We recognize our goals clearly: to develop in our classrooms students who are active participants in the transaction between reader and text which is interpreting literature, and who can themselves discover levels of meaning in the literature they read. What sometimes elude us are the means to achieve that goal: strategies which involve students directly in working on and responding to the works they study, and which lead them to discover meanings independently.

In the discussion which follows, I shall describe a sequence of activities designed to lead students to responsive analysis and interpretation of narrative fiction. These strategies are based on my conclusion that we can achieve our goals as literature teachers most effectively by teaching students not the answers to questions about specific works or literature but the application of generalizable strategies to many works. The strategies I use derive from a basic assumption about fiction: that its plot structure--the way the events are selected and arranged to lead to a climax--conveys the story's broader meaning.[1] I begin, therefore, by introducing students to the nature of fictional plots. At this stage, I use two activities: a "Six Events" game[2] and a follow-up activity, "My Morning." Both are designed to help

students see that a series of events is not by itself an interesting plot; interest is aroused when a series of events involves "friction," a problem or conflict which creates tension, and thus audience interest. In the "Six Events" game, each student is asked to list six unrelated concrete events on a sheet of paper, to tear the paper so that each event is on a separate sheet, and to exchange the bundle of slips with a student partner. Students are then asked to "construct a story" out of the six events they receive, arranging the events in any order they wish, and to tell that story to their partners. I give no hints at this point about what a "story" is. After partner story-telling, we talk as a class about what they did to their bundle of events to turn them into a story. If the discussion elicits the idea of making a conflict or problem for a character and of solving the problem, or at least ending the story satisfactorily, then we have developed the basic elements of a fictional plot. If, however, as sometimes happens, the students become so engaged in inventing wild conjunctions of events that they lose sight of story-telling, I use the game as an ice-breaker and follow it with "My Morning." I offer to tell them a story about my morning, then treat them to a list of typical morning events (e.g., turned off the alarm at 6:00, poured orange juice, made tea, fried an egg...). Soon the protests come: "That's not a story!" "Why not?" "It's boring!" "Why?" "Nothing happens!" At this point, we can use their frustration as the beginning of a discussion of events that "happen" in the real world and the events that "happen" in stories. Eventually we conclude that in fiction events are connected by more than chronology, and that the connection usually involves friction, a problem that interests us as readers. Students not only enjoy these games, but become accustomed to actively participating in discussion and in "working on" stories.

At this point, I give students a simple definition of fiction. Fiction is built on plot. A plot is based on a problem which is complicated by events until it reaches a "climax" or point at which the problem is dealt with. I avoid using the term "conflict" because it implies clear opposition between two external forces for many students; similarly, I avoid using "solved" in connection with the climax because often the climax of a story does not present a neat solution to the plot problem. As we discuss plot, I also indicate that the character who has the problem is the main character and, perhaps, that the forces which create the problem are sometimes called the character's antagonists. We practice working with these simple concepts on very short stories I invent until they can handle the basic definitions. Then we begin doing "event analyses" of professional stories.

The event analysis done by students is the first important analytic activity in this sequence, and the activity from which all later stages are developed. Its form is simple: for each story assigned, students are to indicate in writing the main character and problem, and to list the main events in the story. At first we identify the climax in class; later, students label it on the list of events they have prepared. Class discussions involve comparing notes and making a class version of the event analysis on the board. We may also indicate relationships among events, distinguishing between those which are related chronologically and those which are causally related. Such discussions reinforce the ideas that main events develop the plot problem, and that events in an interesting plot are not simply sequential.

Students should begin this kind of analysis with stories whose main characters and events are easily identifiable, and whose plot problem is easy to isolate. Straightforward adventure stories such as Connell's "The Most Dangerous Game" or stories with clearly identifiable stages, such as Ray Bradbury's "Time in Thy Flight" are quite easy to work with. My class notes for an event analysis of "The Most Dangerous Game" might look something like this:

Main Character: Sanger Rainsford (antagonist: General Zaroff)

Problem: Surviving being hunted by the General (his simple ideas about the hunter and the hunted?)

Main Events:

1. Discussion with Whitney (introduces plot ideas of being hunted, the existence of evil)
2. Falls overboard (device to get him to island)
3. Meets General and learns that General hunts men (similarity and difference in their characters)
4. The General chooses Rainsford as his quarry
5. Rainsford lays complicated trail
6. General follows him but does not shoot
7. Rainsford uses Malay man trap
8. General survives
9. Knife trick kills Ivan
10. Rainsford dives into the sea
11. General returns home disappointed
12. Rainsford wins final duel in General's bedroom

The parenthetical notes on plot ideas and character are more relevant to later stages of the sequence than to simple event analysis.

If I were using this story early in our study of plot, I would concentrate on identifying main events in class discussion. Students often have problems isolating main events; at first their event lists may include every action in the story. With some classes, I find class discussion sufficient to solve this problem. I remind them that a "main event" significantly develops the action related to the plot problem (that is, it adds to our understanding of the problem, is caused by the problem, or increases the tension in the story). We practice using those ideas on their lists, going over each event analysis carefully on the board. Other classes may benefit from being given mimeographed sheets for each story, with some main events already listed and a clear indication of the minimum or maximum number of "main" events indicated--10-14, for example, in "The Most Dangerous Game." Later, an indication of the minimum-maximum range of events should be sufficient guidance for them.

Using event analyses early in students' study of fiction has several advantages. In the first place, students develop the habit of working on the stories they read, and begin to learn that reading is an active process. Class discussions are usually lively and genuine explorations of issues because there is seldom only one right analysis. Students are also using the same technique on several stories, and thus practicing a generalizable skill rather than answering specific study guide questions. Finally, since event analyses are possible for stores at all levels of difficulty, teachers can structure practice sequences based on the same concepts for classes of varying ability levels.

Once students are comfortable with event analyses (and just before the repetition becomes monotonous), I introduce the next stage in the process of finding meaning: answering the question What is the story about? To answer this question, students must return to the event analysis of the story in order to translate its specific plot problem into a more general one. To do this they need to answer further questions: What more general idea or issue is the specific plot problem an example of? What more general idea or issue causes the specific plot problem? Practice with stories whose general plot problem is closely related to the specific one helps students here. The General's hunting human beings easily generalizes to "evil," or perhaps more specifically to "putting oneself above everyone else." In another old chestnut, de Maupassant's "The Necklace," students also see quite clearly that the heroine's specific problem, the cause of her actions, is her own greed (or her need to pretend she

has more social status than she has). It is then an easy step for them to the idea of greed, or obsession with status, as the general plot problem. While it is possible to use new stories at this stage, I often return to previously-discussed event analyses, especially with students just beginning to analyze fiction.

As students become comfortable with the idea of general plot problem, they begin to see its causal relationship to the main events. Often, as in "The Necklace," it is the main character's dominant character trait. In other stories, it is an external force in the character's world: the implacable forces of nature in "To Build a Fire," the antagonist's character in "The Most Dangerous Game," or an abstraction such as civil war in O'Flaherty's "The Sniper." The concept works equally well with stories at many levels of complexity, and can provide a focus for a sequence moving from simple (external) plot problems to those based in human psychology. Because there is room in class discussion for genuine disagreement, the students are less dependent on the teacher's "right" answers in discovering a story's subject. They are also continuing to work actively on stories and are practicing a generalizable skill.

After students are able to identify general plot problems, we can move to the final stage of the sequence, using their event analyses and understanding of the general plot problem to discover meanings in a story. Discovering meaning involves understanding theme, not as an abstract concept which the teacher mysteriously understands, but as the statement(s) or suggestion(s) the story makes about its general plot problem. In order to lead students to discover meaning, I have them answer the question: What is the story saying about what it's about (its general plot problem)? The question is cumbersome, but it avoids the practical problems involved in discussing "theme" without giving an operational definition of that term, and the philosophical problems involved in asking about "meaning."

The answers to the question lie in the climax of the story, already identified by students, and in the author's voice. The climax reveals through action (or lack of it) how we are to understand the sequence of causally related events which led up to it, and thus what statement(s) are being made about the general plot problem. The author's voice also offers important cues for interpreting that climax.

With beginning students, I try to use the climax as much as possible as the basis of interpretation, and deal with voice only indirectly. For example, at the climax of "The Most Dangerous Game," Rainsford destroys General Zarkov. Since General Zarkov represents egocentric evil, and since we have come to admire Rainsford's courage, resourcefulness, and recognition of values beyond the thrill of the chase, the climax strongly suggests that those qualities and values can defeat evil in the world. Similarly, Mme. Loisel's ironic discovery at the climax of "The Necklace" that her suffering in order to repay her friend was unnecessary leads the audience to see that her character, her greed, or her need for status has caused her suffering. Thus, the climax makes a statement about the general plot problem: that greed or pretense is ultimately self-destructive. At the climax of "The Sniper," the main character discovers that he has shot his brother; if civil war is the general plot problem, then the climax reveals that the particular horror of civil war is that it leads brother to kill brother. In this story, it is easy to discuss the role of voice in theme by asking how the audience is supposed to feel at the climax. Few students will answer with positive emotions, even if tone or narrative point of view are not discussed formally. Some will see the horror of the climax itself; others will recognize that the narrator's matter of fact, almost reportorial tone emphasizes that horror. In either case, students see the story's statement about the particular horror of civil war.

Clearly, if students work with relatively simple stories, their statements of meaning will also be relatively simple, and that simplicity may appear to be an important limitation on the usefulness of this sequence of strategies. For beginning students, I think this limitation is at least balanced by the fact that they develop an interpretation from their own work on the story. More experienced readers can move on to more complex stories, such as Steinbeck's "The Chrysanthemums," in which interpreting the climax requires insight into complex emotions. Or they can work with stories such as Roth's "The Conversion of the Jews" or Faulkner's "Barn Burning" in order to recognize that in each case the author's tone, in particular his sympathy with the main character, shapes our understanding of the story's climax, and hence of its theme.

Once students can use event analyses to develop their own interpretations of individual stories, they can begin to use their event analyses as the basis for evaluating stories, and thus move from analysis to evaluation surprisingly easily.

One activity which elicits particularly active student involvement deals with evaluating a story's credibility. I introduce the idea of evaluation with an open-ended ranking activity in which students are given the bare outline of a story about Donald, a student who has an opportunity to cheat on an exam, and four possible endings for his story. Students are asked to decide which endings are most and least believable to them, and to rank the four endings numerically.[3] I generally record the class's ranking on the board without comment, then ask for explanations from them for all their choices. We move from this introductory activity to similar activities evaluating the credibility of individual stories which will be discussed in class. Before assigning each story in this sequence, I give students a mimeographed sheet containing a brief plot summary and four possible endings, three I have invented and one which the author actually used. For example, I might give them the following sheet based on O. Henry's "After Twenty Years."

Consider the following story outline. Then study the possible endings listed after it. Decide how you would rate each ending (from best to worst) and be prepared to explain why you rated each one as you did.

The Story

Two boys grew up as best friends in New York City. When they were eighteen and twenty, they had a last dinner together, then the younger boy headed west to make his fortune. Before he left, they agreed to meet again in twenty years at the restaurant where they had their farewell dinner. The older boy stayed in New York. He didn't hear from his old friend during the twenty years.

a. On the night 20 years later when they were supposed to meet, the New Yorker received a telegram from his old friend saying he couldn't be there because he had a business conference in Chicago the next day. He enclosed a check for $50 so the man could take his wife out to dinner.

b. They met at the restaurant and spent hours talking over old times. At the end of the dinner, the man from the West decided to return to New York to live because his best and truest friend was in New York. They arranged to go apartment hunting together the next day.

c. The man who stayed in New York became a policeman. Twenty years later, as he walked his beat, he met a man where he and his friend had arranged to meet. The man told him the story of the arrangement, without recognizing the policeman as his friend. The policeman realized his old friend was a wanted criminal and had another policeman arrest him.

d. The two men met as arranged. The man who went west became a rich rancher; the man who stayed east became a poet. They tried to talk to each other, but discovered they had changed so much they had little to say. After a short, uncomfortable dinner, they separated, each a little relieved that the evening was over.

We read the sheet for each story, then rank the endings according to their believability and discuss our reasons. Only after this discussion do we analyze and interpret the stories themselves. Finally, we compare our choices of endings with the author's. We can evaluate the author's choice by seeing if it is causally related to the sequence of events in the story, if it is consistent with the characters as we have come to understand them, and if it is consistent with our own knowledge of the world.

If I use stories with endings based on coincidence, such as "After 20 Years," discussions are particularly interesting. Students are torn between their enjoyment of a surprise ending and their discovery that there is little or no justification for that ending either in their own experience or in the event sequence in the story.

I sometimes develop this evaluation activity beyond individual stories. When we have a backlog of stories we've analyzed, I will often choose four for students to evaluate according to the relative credibility and consistency of their endings. In this case I make a grid on the board:

TITLE	RANK 1	2	3	4

We fill it in and discuss individual rankings and the reasons for them. We also identify class patterns. If I have chosen stories which range from those based on coincidence through adventure to psychology, discussions are lively as students express their individual values. Some prefer the surprise ending, others the clear conflicts of an adventure story, and still others the insight into human nature provided by a psychological study. I carefully refrain from giving my rankings until after the discussion; if we disagree at that point, they have a chance to compare their standards with mine without having been influenced by them from the beginning. More experienced students can do similar evaluation activities focusing on the depth or freshness of the meanings developed by a series of stories, or on realism or depth of characterization.

The three steps in this sequence--event analysis, identification of general plot problem, and discovery of statements about that problem--can also be extended to fiction whose structure is more ambiguous, or longer and more complex. Twentieth-century writers such as Kafka or Joyce often deliberately violate or blur the clear structural principles discussed here as a way of suggesting their own complex visions of the world. Practice on stories that are not structurally simple has the added advantage of reminding students that there is no simple, mechanical formula for interpreting fiction.

Novelists and dramatists often develop their theme(s) through multiple plots. The segments of novels which each plot strand unifies can be treated as extended 'stories', with their own specific and general plot problems, main events, climaxes, and statements of meaning. When teaching a novel whose plot strands converge on a single theme, such as To Kill A Mockingbird or Kim, I begin by identifying plot segments for the class and asking them to do the analysis and interpretation of them. Later, especially with able students, we identify plot segments together, recognizing that those segments are defined by a single plot problem. Near the end of our study, we use the board to record the important information about each plot strand and to identify significant similarities in general plot problems and statements of meaning. We then build an interpretation of the novel's meaning(s) based on those similarities. Students who have practiced on individual stories recognize that their night's reading assignment in a novel is an active one and approach these complex activities with surprising confidence.

Finally, although the strategies I describe here all focus on the structure of fiction, using them does not preclude class emphasis on other aspects of a work: setting, character, or use of images and symbols. Writers frequently use descriptions of setting, for example, to suggest important aspects of the plot problem, main events, or main character, as in "The Chrysanthemums" where the opening paragraph establishes the sense of being trapped which is the main character's problem. In other stories, images and symbols are devices used by the author to share our response to events in the narrative sequence. Because all these uses of language are relatively sophisticated techniques closely related to the study of voice, I prefer to reserve discussion of them until students have practiced interpreting simpler, more plot-based stories.

I can make no claims that students who work with these strategies move directly to brilliant critical analyses of Crime and Punishment. I have noticed that the number of plaintive "I couldn't have seen that without you!" cries has diminished in my classroom. More importantly, providing students with strategies they can themselves use to discover meanings in literature can, I hope, lead them to participate actively in the reading process, and to experience the rewards that come from that participation.

Notes

[1]The important role of voice (point of view and tone) in shaping how a reader interprets events I leave for later class discussion.

[2]This game was introduced to me by Professor Charles Duke of Murray State University.

[3]My source for Donald's story is also Charles Duke, Murray State University.

RESPONDING TO LITERATURE FROM WITHIN: THE UNTOLD STORY GAME

Gary M. Salvner, Youngstown State University

The oldest new word in literature pedagogy is "response." Student responses to literature have been scrutinized for a long time in publications about English instruction. In her classic Literature as Exploration, for example, Louise Rosenblatt observed, "In the teaching of literature, then, we are basically helping our students to learn to perform in response to a text.... The reader performs the poem or novel, as the violinist performs the sonata. But the instrument on which the reader plays, and from which he evokes the work, is--himself."[1]

But if this concern with response is not new, it has at least been rediscovered in recent scholarly attempts to integrate the language skills of reading and writing.[2] In that scholarship the nature of written response to literature has again received serious discussion. Writing is again being seen as a uniquely valuable way of discovering what one has read and of making a response to that discovery.

For some time I have been exploring the use of instructional gaming to provoke useful written responses to literature from students. As structures for literature study, games seem promising for at least two reasons. First, they can easily be designed to accentuate those elements of narrative literature that students most easily respond to: character, setting, plot, theme, and image. Games, like stories, are about people, places, and events. Second, and most important, games allow students to enter the world of the book and to respond to that world from within--as participants, in some way, in the story. Response from such a participant becomes an imaginative extension of the work--a "performance" on the literature, as Rosenblatt would say.

"The Untold Story Game," reproduced below, illustrates this kind of gaming activity for the literature classroom. It may be used as a class exercise with any literary work in which one or more characters are sufficiently developed to invite expansion beyond the limits of the narrative. I have seen it used successfully in grades 7-12, and it could also be streamlined for use with upper elementary students.

The only teacher preparations needed to make the game playable are to organize the class into reporting teams of four to six students and then to fill in the names of a character, work, and author on the blank lines in the middle of each team's TASK SHEET. All instructions to students are given in the game itself. With most classes, the activity can be completed in one 50-minute period.

A note on grading. Evaluations of gaming activities, if they occur at all, must emerge from the game's created world for the activity not to be damaged by them. In "The Untold Story," for example, the evaluator's only proper role is as editor of the publications presented in the game. In that role she might want to measure the overall quality of the writing, the appropriateness of the style for that particular publication, the newsworthiness of the untold story, and the story's consistency with facts already known about the character (as revealed in the original work of literature).

Notes

[1]Louise M. Rosenblatt, Literature as Exploration, 3rd ed. (New York: Noble and Noble, 1976), p. 279.

[2]An excellent article which discusses this integration is Anthony R. Petrosky, "From Story To Essay: Reading and Writing," College Composition and Communication, 33 (1982), 19-36.

THE UNTOLD STORY GAME

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Untold Story Game. This activity will ask you as a group to cooperate on planning and writing a short feature article about a character from a piece of literature you have read recently. During the game, you will work through a series of steps to put that story together. How well you know that character, how imaginative you are, and how skillfully you follow instructions and work together under a strict time limit will determine your success in the game.

GETTING STARTED

Ready to go? First complete the steps below in order:

Step 1: Get Organized

Before you do anything, get settled together in a small circle and select a leader. The person you select should be one who can coordinate your individual efforts and keep the group moving. Once elected, the leader should be given these materials.

Step 2: Your Assignment

Now that you're settled, it's time to find out more about what you'll be doing. A description of your task appears on the next page (called the TASK SHEET). Group leader: read this TASK SHEET aloud to your group. (Notice that the sheet contains two blanks that must be filled in. Don't worry about those yet. Just say "blank" when you come to them.)

Step 3: Some Specifics

Now it's time to fill in blanks (A) and (B) on your TASK SHEET. Each of these blanks is to be filled in with one item your group will select from the lists on page 3. Note that the choices you make will control what you do for the rest of the game, so make your selections carefully. Follow the suggestions on page 3 under each list.

When you have made your choices, copy them in the spaces on your TASK SHEET. Your TASK SHEET is now complete. Read it once more to your group. Then turn to page 4 for further instructions.

2

TASK SHEET

You are a team of investigative reporters working for (A)_____. You have just reported for work today and are casually discussing the weather and yesterday's sports scores when your editor and a person you don't know rush into the room together. Pointing at the stranger, your editor bellows, "Get this person's story and write it up fast! I want it for today's edition." Then your editor hurries out.

It seems that this person now standing in your office has some important information that has never before been revealed about _____, the fascinating character in the book _____ _____ by _____. It is this "untold story" that your editor wants you to piece together and write up.

Fortunately, the stranger in your office is most cooperative. Quickly you find out that the story has to do with (B)_____ _____. As you question this mysterious individual further, your team is able to gather enough specific details for a fascinating feature article for your publication.

Now it's time to write that article. It must be done immediately to meet today's publication deadline. When you have completed this sheet, turn to page 4 for further instructions.

3

Instructions for Completing Blanks (A) and (B) on TASK SHEET

BLANK (A): KIND OF PUBLICATION

Before you begin your story, you need to know something about the newspaper or magazine you work for. Luckily, you have a choice. Select one of the three publications listed below and write its name in the blank marked (A) on your TASK SHEET. Choose carefully. Your selection will tell you something about what kind of audience to write for and what kind of writing style to use.

1. The National Snoop--the country's leading gossip newspaper. Articles in this paper are sensationalistic. The Snoop's readers are busybodies who want lurid, exaggerated details.

2. Personality--a weekly magazine which reports on the lives of important people. Readers are "average" Americans who enjoy reading chatty, casual, informally written articles.

3. New York Chronicle--one of the country's most respected daily newspapers. Articles for this paper are usually factual, not emotional. Readers are well-educated, mostly upper class Americans.

BLANK (B): KIND OF STORY

In general there are three kinds of untold stories you can write. Choose one by selecting 1, 2, or 3 below and copying that information in the blank marked (B) on your TASK SHEET. This selection will help you to control your story once you begin writing it. (NOTE: Be sure that your choice is consistent with

the character you're writing about. You couldn't, for example, pick #3 below for a character who died at the end of the book you read.)

1. Some previously unknown facts about the background of this character (including events which happened before the beginning of the book you read).

2. Something previously unknown about this character's involvement with one or more of the events in the book you read.

3. Something which has happened to this character since the events reported in the book you read.

4

MORE INSTRUCTIONS

Now that you know the details of your task, it's time to get started! Follow these steps:

Step 4: Review

Before you write anything, put your heads together and review the story of your character in the book named on your TASK SHEET. Also discuss the character briefly--his/her strengths, weaknesses, interests, etc. You might want to take notes on scratch paper.

Step 5: Create

Now the hard work begins. Invent an imaginative "untold story" about your character, one that you think will be of interest to the readers of your publication. Be sure to create the kind of "untold story" you selected for Blank (B) on your TASK SHEET.

Start with what you know about this character from the book you read, and then let your imaginations go. Your story should fit the personality of your character, but it should also be clever and original. Take notes on scratch paper if necessary.

Step 6: Publishing Format

Once you have an idea for your story, there is one more thing you should do before you write it out. Look over the last page of this packet to see what the final draft of your story will look like. DO NOT WRITE ANYTHING ON PAGE 6 RIGHT NOW. THIS FORM IS ONLY TO BE USED FOR YOUR FINAL DRAFT.

Notice that the name of your publication will appear at the top of your page and that your story will have to have a headline. Also notice that your article will include a picture. (More on that later.) Estimate how much you'll be able to write on the two columns of lines so that you'll know approximately how long to make your story.

Step 7: Write!

Write out a rough draft of your story on scratch paper. (Probably the best way to do this as a group is to have someone write while the rest of the group suggests details and sentences.) Rewrite if necessary. Revise.

Now think up a clever headline for your article. At the same time, have the "artist" in your group make a few practice drawings for your story's picture. (This picture might be a "photograph" of your character, a scene from his/her untold story, etc.) Be imaginative.

Step 8: Publishing Instructions

Follow these "publishing" instructions to complete pages 5 and 6. Work carefully.

Page 5: Under "From", print carefully the names of your group members. Then write the name of your character and the headline of your article on the lines at the bottom.

Page 6: Print the name of your publication and your headline in the spaces at the top of the page. Then neatly copy your story on the two columns of lines. (It must fit on this one page!) Have your artist copy his/her masterpiece in the box in the right column. Print a caption for the picture in the narrow rectangle under it.

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU'RE DONE! TURN IN EVERYTHING (INCLUDING NOTES AND ROUGH DRAFTS) TO YOUR TEACHER.

5

MEMORANDUM

DATE_____

To: The Editor

From: Names of Group Members

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

MESSAGE:

Here is the "untold story" article about _____ which you requested
(character's name)
for today's edition. We hope you'll agree that it is a fantastic piece of journalism. We have titled it _____
(your headline)
_____.

6

(name of publication)

date:

(headline)

CLUSTERING FOR READER RESPONSE TO CREATIVE WRITING

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In the past decade, peer response to literature has received considerable attention in professional journals and publications. Alternatives to the more traditional instructional responses have been suggested. Works by Bleich (1975), Rosenblatt (1978), and others have shifted emphasis from simple recall and retrieval of textual information to individual perception, interpretation, and interaction with the printed page. Applying this reader-response theory to a specific method of evaluation can result in valuable classroom learning. The purpose of this article is to discuss the use of "clustering" as a method for eliciting reader response through peer evaluation of creative writing.

Clustering is an organizational strategy meant to aid comprehension. A cluster is a conceptual configuration that shows the relationship of ideas. Rico (1978) employs the clustering strategy to comprehend a work of art. She suggests that the reader uses this configurational process to achieve intelligent reconstruction. The reader moves from the whole to the parts to a fuller understanding of the whole. The reader explores, changes, and confirms or denies hypotheses about the selection by building and elaborating on a central impression. Rico suggests that the clustering strategy "acknowledge(s) the perplexity of the knower and the complexity of the reading experience" (p. 46) while the reader determines non-literal meaning.

This strategy for responding to a work of art corresponds closely to Bleich's (1975) three-phase heuristic for developing reader response. Bleich has the reader write

extensively about what has been read. The written response develops from perception (what the reader sees) to affect (what the reader feels about what is perceived) to association (why the reader feels that way). The emphasis is on the individual and the unique, personal meaning re-created in the comprehension process.

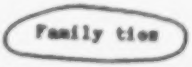
This response process with the use of the clustering strategy begins once a student author has written a poem or short story. The peer responder is asked to read the selection. Upon completion of the reading, the responder writes, in the center of a sheet of paper, a word or impression derived from the work, without looking back at it. This emergence of a focus is similar to Elbow's (1973) center-of-gravity idea in writing and the initial phase of Bleich's perception stage.

Student Sample

Sisters

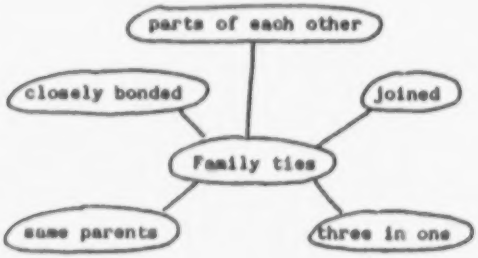
We are three in one.
Parts of each other;
Yet, unique in some special way.
Though we were born of the same parents,
Who were themselves individuals,
Yet joined.
We do not have the same values,
Share the same beliefs,
Or think the same way.
We are closely bonded;
Yet, at times
We could be no farther apart.
We are sisters;
Three in one.

Central Impression



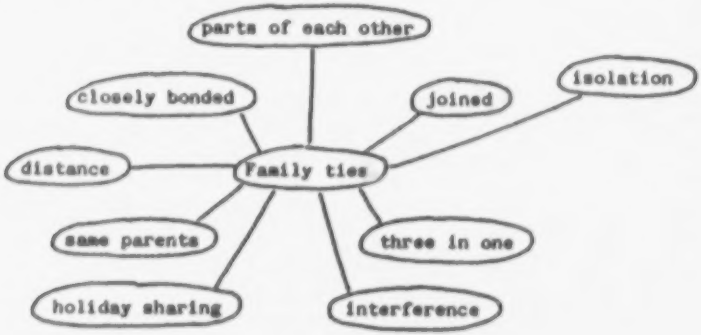
The reader then returns to the selection to locate specific words and phrases that relate to and help create the central impression. As in Bleich's perception stage, the words and phrases support what the reader sees. These words are written in circles at the ends of spokes emanating from the center circle.

Text Support for the Central Impression



The next step asks the student responder to add personal words and phrases further supporting the central impression. The text would not be consulted since the student is analyzing individual background and indicating personal connections to the literary work, not unlike the affective response of Bleich's heuristic. These responses are placed at the end of longer spokes.

Personal Connections to the Central Impression



The procedure can then be repeated with the same responder reclustering around another dominant impression. This second response allows the reader to reflect further, possibly discovering additional interrelationships and resulting in a more refined response and a deeper understanding.

To this point, the clustering activity has been an aesthetic experience for the reader. By subsequently sharing the cluster configurations with the student author, an associative dialogue can occur. The author has an opportunity to see the effect of the work on an audience in a meaningful (interpretive) rather than judgmental ("I liked it") and often meaningless context. The author is able to assess the readability of the created work in terms of the reader's personal response. Discussion of the interpretation can provide opportunities for Bleich's third stage, association, when the writer and the responder discuss the reasons for the reader's reactions and the perhaps very different intended meaning of the author. Re-examination, questioning, revision, shifts in emphasis, and a better final product are often the result of this extended and valuable discourse.

In a recent article, Petrosky (1982) suggests that "we need...to share, read, and comment on each other's written responses if we are to understand ourselves as readers and writers..." (p. 20). Providing the student responder with a definitive and effective procedure for evaluation of another student's creative writing can contribute to developing insight for both pupils involved. The writer and the reader have a basis for extended dialogue and gain an in-depth understanding of themselves and the numerous aspects of the meaning-making process.

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THE WRITER, THE READER, THE POEM: AN INQUIRY APPROACH TO POETRY

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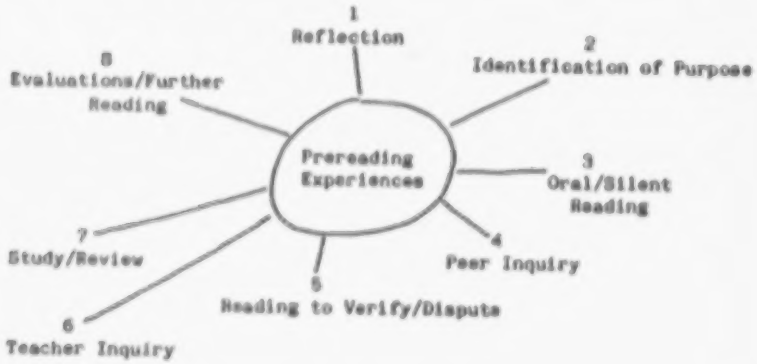
One summer afternoon, a young agricultural agent drove his dusty, government-owned vehicle down the dirt road which led to a large farm-house about a mile from the main highway. Stopping near the house, he emerged from his car and sauntered up to the front porch. There in a swing sat the old, retired owner of all the surrounding farm-land. "Howdy," said the agent. "I've come to tell you how to get some better crop yields." The old gentleman leaned forward in his swing, studied the pipe he was fingering, and rejoined, "Well, young feller, it's like this. I don't farm now half as well as I know how to."

The old gentleman's point of view toward farming is sadly similar to the view many teachers hold toward poetry. Many of us don't teach poetry now half as well as we know how to. How to teach poetry well is a matter our profession largely ignored through the first half of this century. Mary Graham Lund wrote in 1952, "There are few teachers who have success with teaching poetry. We can find about forty reports of experiments in educational magazines every year since 1929."[1] Between 1952 and 1982, happily, we can find reports of considerably more than forty experiments per year in the teaching of poetry; however, compared to other genres, poetry still receives scant attention in the secondary school classroom. Why is this so?

In the fall semester of 1981, I offered a graduate course at Old Dominion University called "Teaching Poetry, Grades 7-12." More than twenty secondary school English teachers signed up. On the first night of class, I asked, "Why are you taking this course, anyway?" I was surprised to hear several

say something like the following: "I'm taking it because, frankly, I've never really liked poetry myself, so I tend to avoid it in my classroom. I'd like to change my feelings about it so I can teach it better." My eclectic rendition of these teachers' responses has several severe implications. First, the teachers' educations (college majors in English, mind you) had somehow failed them. Second, it's no wonder that, as William Ojala has noted, "...poetry is the second most disliked subject of the English classroom for most students (only grammar seems to be disliked more)."[2] And third, the capacity which poetry has to teach and to delight, to amuse and to inspire, to calm and to arouse is going largely untapped in contemporary society. But there is also at least one hopeful implication in the teachers' responses. They want to like poetry, and they want to teach it well. I believe, too, that students can be led to care about poetry, and that they can "learn" it well.

It is with that conviction, then, that I offer the following approach to teaching poetry. It's an approach which places the student—not the teacher and not the poem—at the center. The approach might be illustrated by the following diagram, with an explanation afterwards:



At the core of this approach is the prereading experience--a stimulus, a way of preparing students to read the poem, a way of generating a sense of anticipation. The territory to explore for effective prereading experiences is vast, certainly, limited only by an unwillingness to look, to listen, to reason, and to imagine. As an example, let's say that I wish to teach the poem "Citykid," by R. Baird Shuman, a poem which has been anthologized in secondary school literature textbooks. As a prereading experience--and as a writing way into reading--I might say to students, "When you think of the city, what images come to mind? Make a list of things you associate with the city." After a few minutes, I might say, "Now make a list of things you like most about the city. It's O.K. to use items from your first list." Again after a few minutes, I say "Now, make a third list of images or items you do not like about the city." Following this final list, I ask students to study all three of their lists for a moment (here begins the reflection phase--the elements in the approach I have diagrammed are recursive, i.e. they go back and forth; no lock-step sequence is intended). At this point, I ask students to place before them clean sheets of paper and, in the left margins of the paper, number the lines consecutively, 1-5. On corresponding lines, I ask them to answer the following questions, using only single words or phrases in their responses.[3]

Line 1: What is your favorite image in the city?

Line 2: How might you describe this image? Consider such qualities as color, shape, height, width, weight.

Line 3: What might your image do in a heavy wind?

Line 4: How might your image look on a really dark night?

Line 5: What object, time, event, feeling, or person does your chosen image remind you of?

After this exercise, I say to students, "Look at your answers. Try to rewrite what you have written as a poem. You already have a good start. Change whatever you want to, or feel you have to, in order to make your finished product look like a poem--a five-line poem. Use whatever punctuation you wish." Most students seem to have little difficulty with this exercise. Nearly all of them can create poetic "structures" this way. Two which I have collected from initially skeptical students are these:

A bridge
Gray, angular, long
Defying force
Stark reminder on a dark landscape of
Lonely times

Pigeons —
Oily necks, tiny heads, stiff struts;
Riding a harsh wind and
Flashing white against a spangled sky —
Cold night in the city

Great poetry, good poetry, bad poetry? Such questions here are unimportant. What we are after in this case is a way into a poem for study. Such exercises are merely that—exercises. Admittedly, poetry written in this fashion might not portray an "honest" picture of the creative process. Few (if any) poets—contemporary ones, at least—create poems by playing the kind of game I have described. Other games maybe: looking out (carefully and intently), looking in (to explore one's responses to what is "out there"), letting it flow out, and making are phrases which get more nearly close to an accurate description of the creative process than any prefabricated exercise might.[4] Nevertheless, for our purposes here, the exercise has merit, I maintain.

At this point, I invite students to reflect on their efforts. Sometimes I ask them to exchange their work with one or more other students, both to provide an audience and to pursue the process of revision. Inviting volunteers to read their writing to the class almost invariably results in many raised hands and many enthusiastic responses. No one is to serve as severe critic of the poems which are read aloud. This isn't really a harsh session on identifying and correcting flaws, after all. Finally, I'm ready to say: "Before I pass out copies of this poem, tell me what subject you expect it to be about." A chorus very often responds, "The city!" The reflection phase continues.

Citykid[5]

They took the boy out of the city
But no matter how they tried
They could not wrest the city magic
From the boy.

He looked at trees and rushing streams
And in them saw reminders of light posts
And teams of people flooding into subway stops
At half past five.

They told him he must walk in woods through autumn
gold,
That he must learn to hunt and fish to be a man
But he had hunted, fished for coins through gratings
And walked in autumn woods at ten or twelve
When people prowl the streets to make seductions,
When eyes peer in the darkness avidly like Rousseau's
tigers*
And hands stroke body parts bound tight in clothes.

The boy was made to feel he was wrong
And they were right.
For, with them, there was no middle ground,
Just right and those who did not fit its mold:
The boy, enduring now in their good hands
The punishment, the soul starvation
Of a rehabilitation
Out of town.

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*Rousseau's tigers: French painter Henri Rousseau, most famous of the "primitive" painters recognized by modern art history.

With two questions, I identify our purpose for reading this poem together. "When I read this poem aloud to you, keep these questions in mind: What attitudes toward the city does the poem express or suggest? How do the images in this poem compare or contrast with yours?" After students hear the oral reading (a good oral reading, we hope), they read the poem silently and reflect on the questions. Presumably, many of them will begin to see, minimally, that "they" in the poem do not feel the city is a healthy place for "the boy." On the other hand, "the boy" likes the city and feels that his forced removal from it is a kind of "soul starvation" for him to endure. Identifying these two attitudes calls for little inference-making ability; primarily, a "plain sense" level of comprehension is what is required.

Next, in the peer inquiry phase, I divide students into several groups (typically, four or five per group) to discuss the purpose for hearing and reading the poem. I insist that they limit their discussion first to the questions about

attitudes. When everyone in each group has had his/her say, I ask the students to talk about the second question--how the images in their poems relate to the images in "Citykid." Again, each person per group must have a say. Obviously, some students will be able to identify clear similarities and differences between their images and those of "Citykid"; some will not. Often, however, the discussions begin to ricochet in several different directions. Students begin to probe into other elements of the poem, and this happens without teacher intervention.

After disbanding the groups, I ask students individually to read the poem silently again to verify or to dispute their own ideas or those expressed by others during the group discussions. Even if there were no significant disagreements among group discussants, another reading of the poem can serve to solidify, to expand, to sharpen the original purpose for reading. But in this reading, many students go far beyond the original purpose to other realms of comprehension or confusion about the poem.

In the teacher inquiry phase, I begin by asking students if they have questions they would like to raise for discussion. Some usually do, and I invite other students to answer before I do. I attempt to maintain a spirit of inquiry by making my answers tentative--as they usually are, anyway. Depending upon how the discussion goes, I suggest these additional questions (others certainly could be asked):

(1) Is there a "story" in "Citykid," expressed or suggested?

(2) How does "the boy" feel about being in the country? How do you know how he feels? Why does he feel as he does? How can you tell?

(3) Who do you think "they" are in the poem?

(4) Is there any irony in the poem? What is irony, anyway?

(5) What qualities would you assign to "they" in the poem? Are "they" bad? Good? What can you say about them?

(6) How about "the boy"? What qualities would you assign to him?

When the discussion has wound down, I ask students to study and to review the poem on their own. They should focus on questions. Do they still have some? And they should review the various points-of-view, speculations, and comments which came up during their earlier readings, their group discussions, and the whole class discussion. Perhaps some class time might be allowed for this phase, or students can study and review the poem and the accompanying discussions elsewhere and on their own.

Finally, students might be led to other poems about the city—or to poems on other subjects. Such an activity as this often encourages further reading. But, if evaluation is necessary (formal testing, that is), this approach has given students ample opportunities to comprehend a poem rather fully. And, perhaps most important, the overall approach has helped students see that they need not be intimidated by poetry. Such a student—centered mode of instruction can help make poetry more than palatable—it can help make poetry a medium through which students can learn how to learn.

Notes

[1]"The Teaching of Poetry," School and Society (September 20, 1952), p. 182.

[2]"On Teaching Poetry to Secondary School Students," Journal of English Teaching Techniques (Winter 1972-'73), p. 23.

[3]What this exercise permits students to do is write an impression, or mood, poem. For a variation of it, as well as other such exercises, see Charles Duke's Teaching Literature Today (Portland, Maine: J. Weston Walch, 1979), pp. 168-205.

[4]Jane Ellen Glasser, a poet-in-the schools in Virginia, suggested these phrases in a presentation to the fellows of the Tidewater Writing Project, Norfolk, Virginia (July 1982).

[5]This poem appears here by permission of the author and of the National Council of Teachers of English.